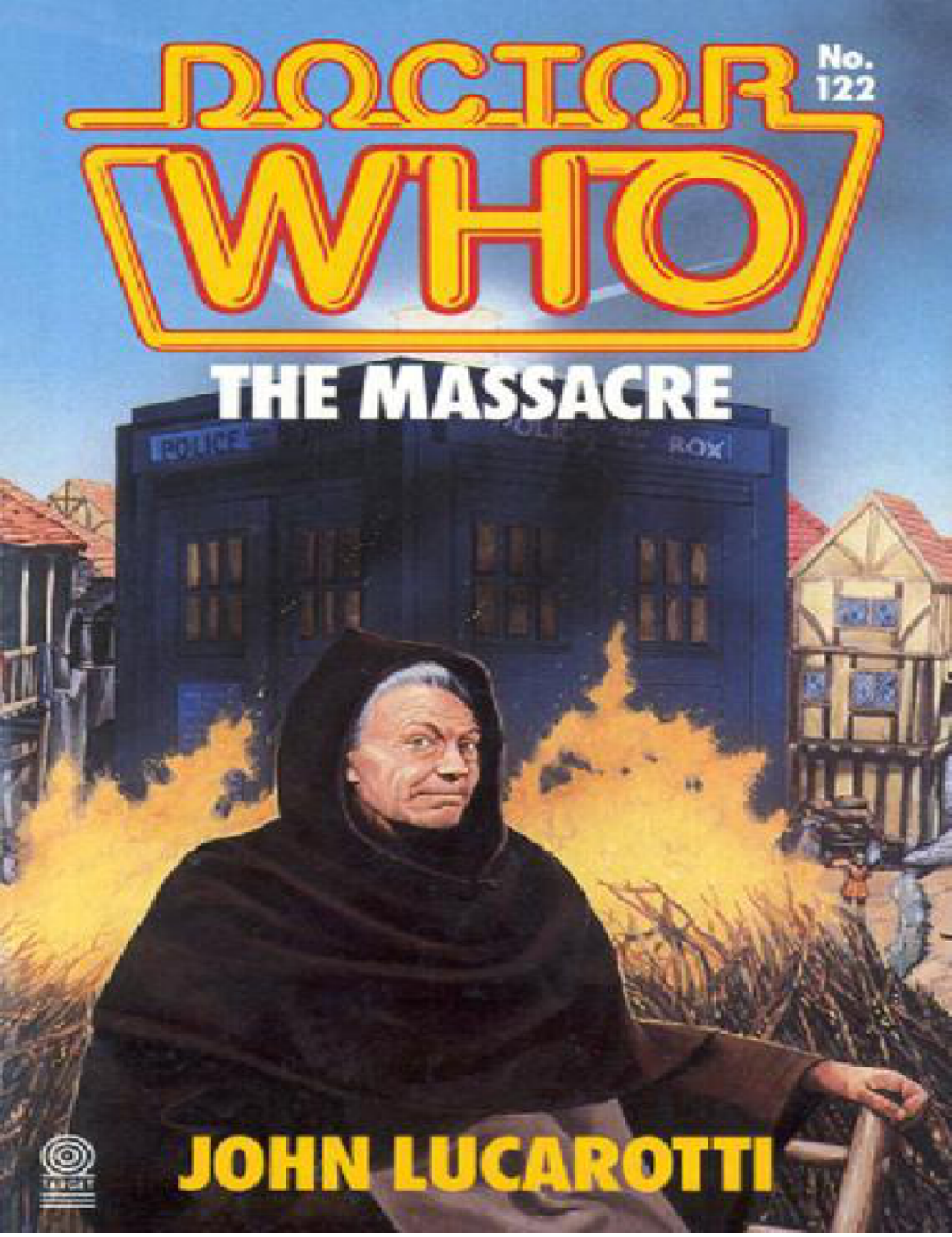
DOCTOR WHO
No. 122
THE MASSACRE
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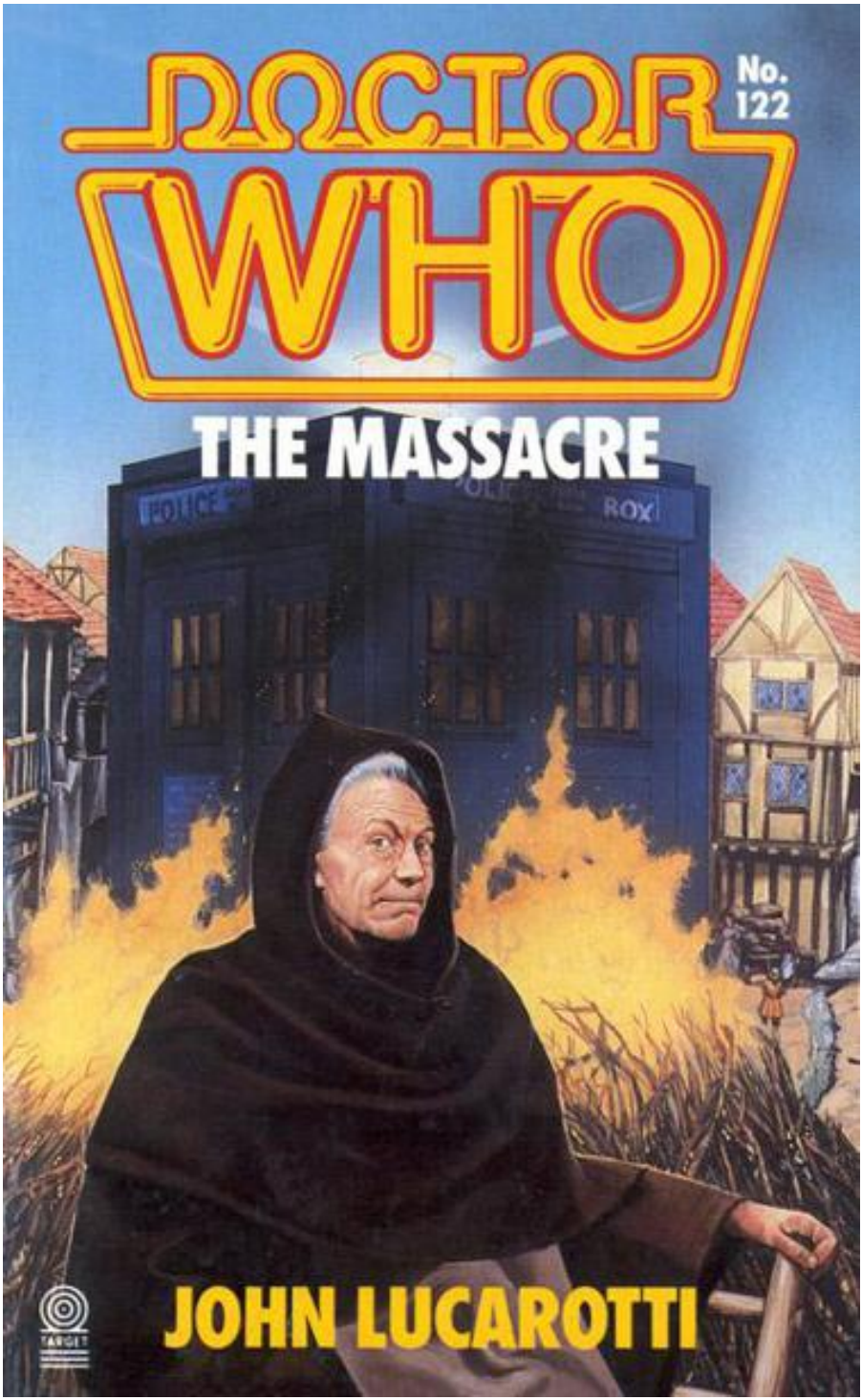
JOHN LUCAROTTI



The TARDIS lands in Paris on 19 August 1572.

Driven by scientific curiosity, the Doctor leaves Steven to meet and exchange views with the apothecary, Charles Preslin.

Before he disappears, he warns Steven to stay out of 'mischief, religion and politics.' But in sixteenth-century Paris it is impossible to remain a mere observer, and Steven soon finds himself involved with a group of Huguenots.

The Protestant minority of France is being threatened by the Catholic hierarchy, and danger stalks the Paris streets. As Steven tries to find his way back to the TARDIS he discovers that one of the main persecutors of the Huguenots appears to be – the Doctor.

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DOCTOR WHO

THE MASSACRE

Based on the BBC television series by John Lucarotti by arrangement

with the British Broadcasting Corporation **JOHN LUCAROTTI**

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The roles of the Doctor and the Abott of Ambroise were played by William Hartnell

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Author's Note

The historical events described in *The Massacre* are factual, as were the 287 kilometres of tunnels and catacombs under Paris, some of which may still be visited. The woodcut engraving of the attempt on de Coligny's life, which shows a cowled cleric in a doorway, does exist. The author has seen it.

John Lucarotti

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The Doctor

Steven Taylor

Charles IX, the 22-year-old King of France Catherine de Medici, The Queen Mother and Regent of France

The Catholics

Henri of Anjou, the King's younger brother Francois, Duke of Guise

Marshall Tavannes

The Abbot of Amboise

Simon Duval, aide to the Abbot of Amboise *The Huguenots*

King Henri of Navarre, Charles's brother-in-law Admiral de Coligny, Charles's favourite advisor Viscount Gaston Lerans, aide to Henri of Navarre Anne Chaplet, the serving girl

Nicholas Muss, secretary to de Coligny Charles Preslin, the apothecary

Prologue

The Doctor sat in the garden which always reminded him of the Garden of Peace when Steven, no, not Steven, his granddaughter, Susan, and that nice young couple, Barbara and Ian, had their adventure with the Aztec Indians aeons ago. But his reminiscences were elsewhere as he browsed through a copy of Samuel Pepys's famous diary of a Londoner's life in the second half of the seventeenth century. He chuckled at a succinct observation and laid the open book down beside him on the bench.

He looked around contentedly. His journeys through time and space in the TARDIS had come to a temporary halt. His differences, as he chose to refer to them, with the Time Lords, of which, after all, he was one, were more or less resolved. This celestial retirement was a far from unpleasant condition when one's memories were so rich.

He had had more than his fair share of adventure and secretly he believed that his fellow Lords were a mite jealous of his achievements.

'As well might they be,' he murmured to a passing butterfly.

That was the moment when he heard their voices all around him.

'Doctor,' they intoned in unison.

He looked up at the blue sky. 'Yes, gentlemen?'

'There is a certain matter we would –' they continued but the Doctor cut across them.

'Just one spokesman, if you don't mind,' he said testily,

'I'm not deaf.'

'The subject concerns your activities –' one of them began.

'Ah,' the Doctor interjected.

'– on the planet Earth in the sixteenth century,' the voice continued, 'the year 1572 Earthtime, to be precise.'

'My memory's not quite what it was, gentlemen,' the Doctor replied, remembering in full his involvement in the momentous events of that year. 'Perhaps a further indication would help me to recall exactly where the TARDIS landed.'

'Paris, France,' the Time Lord said.

'Paris, France,' the Doctor repeated slowly as if he were concentrating. 'Yes, I do seem to remember some kind of technical malfunction in the TARDIS which deposited me there – but only briefly, I think, an hour or so in their time, was it not?'

'Several days, Doctor.'

'Really? As long as that?' The Doctor did his best to sound surprised.

‘We shall accord you a period of time for reflection, Doctor,’ the spokesman continued, ‘but be warned, our research into the affair reveals that your conduct was highly suspect.’

‘Indeed?’ the Doctor replied, and wondered how best to extricate himself from yet another ‘difference’...

1

The Roman Bridge Auberge

The TARDIS landed with a jolt which almost threw the young astronaut Steven Taylor off balance but the Doctor did not seem to notice as he studied the parameters of the time/place orientation print-out on the central control panel of the time-machine.

‘Earth, again,’ he observed and waited for the digits of the time print to stop as they clicked by. But they didn’t, at least not the last two. The first settled at 1 and the second at 5 but the last two fluctuated between 0 and 9

indiscriminately. ‘In the 1500s, we’ll know exactly when in a moment,’ he added hopefully. But it was not to be. The numbers kept flickering by on the screen.

‘No one should allow a kid like me to go up in a crate like this,’ Steven joked but his humour was lost on the Doctor. ‘Perhaps we should ask Mission Control for permission to return for an overhaul.’

‘I am Mission Control,’ the Doctor replied sourly and ordered Steven to open the door as he switched off the main power drives, leaving the interior lighting on the auxiliaries.

Steven obeyed and the stench of putrefaction which hit him in the face almost made him ill on the spot. Under a fierce sun in the clear blue sky the TARDIS stood in the middle of mounds of decomposing rubbish. There was also a wooden fence a little higher than the TARDIS which entirely surrounded them and had a door in it.

‘Perfect,’ the Doctor observed as he looked out. He wore his cloak over his clothes and his astrakhan hat was on his head. In one hand he held his silver-topped cane, in the other a handkerchief to his nose. ‘Putrescence, just what we need,’ he added as someone on the other side of the fence threw several rotting cabbages over it. ‘Couldn’t be better.’

‘Your logic escapes, me, Doctor,’ Steven replied.

‘My dear boy,’ the Doctor said indulgently, ‘people throw their rubbish over the fence rather than bring it in which means that the TARDIS will remain unobserved here whilst we –’ he gestured airily, ‘– explore.’

‘What’s to explore?’

‘The other side of the fence since the aromas on this side of it give me a clue as to where we might be.’ The Doctor momentarily lifted a corner of the handkerchief.

‘Garlic, definitely, garlic,’ he said and then told Steven to fetch a cloak to wear so that they could begin their exploration.

With the TARDIS locked behind them, the Doctor picked his way delicately through the refuse towards the door.

‘We’ll need to use the EDF system when we return,’ he said just before they reached it.

‘What’s that?’ Steven asked.

‘The External Decontamination Function,’ the Doctor replied.

‘A sort of spatial car-wash,’ Steven joked. The Doctor glared at him, opened the door cautiously and peered out.

The fence was on a square of land on one side of the unpaved, pitted street, rutted by carriage wheels. The refuse that had not been thrown over the fence lay there and was being picked at by emaciated dogs. The buildings on both sides were mostly adjoining, between one and two storeys high with overhanging eaves and slated or thatched roofs. The walls were braced with woodenbeams and from most of the small open windows with slatted shutters came pungent odours of cooking.

The people on the street, and they were many, stood or walked under the eaves or in the middle of it. There were hawkers pushing carts laden with meats, vegetables, fish and crustaceous seafoods of every kind. There was a knife-sharpener with his grinding wheel, a carpenter with his mobile lathe and the remainder of his tools in a leather haversack on his back. There were also vendors with their trays slung by straps from their necks, filled with every variety of cheaply-made knicknack, and all of them were selling their wares simultaneously at the stop of their voices. They wore breeches,

billowing shirts and clogs.

Most of them had shoulder-length hair, frequently gathered in a bow at the back. Several had gaudy, gipsy-like bandanas on their heads and a few wore curled, wide-brimmed flat hats.

The women to whom they sold their goods wore full flowing skirts and blouses and their hair was mostly tied back with ribbons. Both buyer and seller negotiated with shouts and yells, shoulder shrugs, arms akimbo, the language of hands and the turning of backs, but each side knowing that shortly the bargain would be struck.

The Doctor stood in the middle of the street, sniffed and announced, 'France.'

Steven smiled. 'French *is* what they're speaking, Doctor,' he said. 'But when? And where?'

'Fifteen hundred and something,' the Doctor replied as Steven wandered over towards the side of the street, trying to read a sign in the ground floor window. 'Don't go there!'

the Doctor shouted. 'Under the eaves or in the middle but not there, Steven, it's dangerous.'

'Why?' Steven asked and a moment later an arm appeared from the first floor window of the house next door and emptied a chamberpot. '*Vive la France*,' Steven muttered as he retreated hastily to the Doctor's side.

'Oh, look at that,' the Doctor exclaimed, pointing to a shuttered shop. 'It's an apothecary's and it's closed.'

'Has been for some time, by the look of it,' Steven added as he looked at the faded paintwork on the sign.

'In 1563, by decree, all religious prejudice was abolished, and everyone had the right to practise according to his or her beliefs,' the Doctor stated. 'But in 1567 it was said that this pretext of religious freedom was undermining the King's authority.'

'Really?' Steven said, unable to think of anything else.

'And amongst other restrictions, one that was imposed was that no apothecary was permitted to exercise his profession without a Certificate of Catholicisation,' the Doctor continued.

Steven stopped in the middle of the street and asked,

‘Why not? What had religion to do with a mortar and pestle?’

‘Ideas, young man, heretical ideas concerning life and death that were not in accord with the dogmas of the Church of Rome,’ the Doctor replied, staring at the closed apothecary shop. ‘The man who owned that place may well have retired normally but equally so he may have been a French Protestant, a Huguenot as they were called – still are for that matter – who was driven out of business because of his religious convictions.’

‘That’s a bit unjust,’ Steven sounded indignant.

‘A bit?’ The Doctor raised one eyebrow. ‘It got much worse than that, Steven.’ He looked around again at the street, at the shop and the people. ‘I wonder,’ he murmured distractedly.

‘What, Doctor?’ Steven asked.

For a few moments the Doctor appeared not to have heard the question and when he turned to face Steven his eyes seemed far away and his voice was also distant. ‘Where are we and when?’

Steven was taken aback. ‘In France in the 1500s. You said so yourself.’

The Doctor’s eyes were suddenly sharp again and his voice authoritative. ‘But exactly where in France, and more precisely what date in which year?’

Steven waved an arm towards the people on the street.

‘Ask one of them,’ he exclaimed.

‘And be thought mad?’ the Doctor retored. ‘That’s a dangerous condition in which to be considered these days,’

he added knowingly. ‘No, they are questions we must answer for ourselves.’ He looked up at the house roofs and beyond them. ‘The skyline should tell us where, a cathedral spire, a tower, a château, a river.’ He paused and then exclaimed. ‘That’s it! The river.’

He went over to a vendor with a tray of cheap medallions and picked one up.

‘The Queen Mother, Catherine of Medici,’ the vendor said quickly, ‘and recently struck. A good likeness, don’t you think?’

‘Very,’ the Doctor replied and threw a small gold coin onto the tray. ‘Where’s the river?’ he asked casually.

‘The Seine? Carry straight on, sir,’ the vendor replied as he popped the coin into the moneybag secured to his belt and hidden in his breeches pocked. ‘You can’t miss it.

There are two bridges, the large one onto the island where the Cathedral is and the small one off the other side.’

‘Thank you, my good man,’ the Doctor replied jauntily.

‘Come along, Steven,’ he added and marched on down the street. Once they were out of earshot he confided that they were definitely in Paris. ‘You heard what he said, Steven, the Seine, the two bridges, *le Grand Pont* and *le Petit Pont*, and l’Ile de Cité with the Cathedral, Notre Dame.’

‘But we still don’t know the year,’ Steven reminded him.

‘If the apothecary was forced out of business, then it’s post-67,’ the Doctor reasoned, ‘but a cursory glance at Notre Dame will confirm that.’

‘It will?’ Steven questioned, not understanding. The Doctor smiled at him indulgently.

‘Notre Dame, like Rome, was not built in a day,’ the Doctor explained. ‘Nor in a century, not even a couple.

Started in the second half of the twelfth, it was completed three centuries later, the last part being the broad steps leading up to it. 1575 unless my memory serves me ill.’

Steven chose not to observe that it frequently had in the past and, no doubt, would again in the future.

As they made their way along the street which frequently twisted and turned one way and then another they noticed that it widened and the houses became more imposing in their style and structure. Then Steven saw the spire of Notre Dame above the rooftops and pointed it out to the Doctor.

‘That’s where we want to be,’ the Doctor conceded and turned off into another street in line with the spire. Steven noted the name of the street they had left, the *rue des Fossés*, the Street of Ditches, which he

thought was apt, and the one they had entered, the *rue du Grand Pont*, the Street of the Large Bridge, which they could now see ahead of them.

The bridge was made of stone and wide enough for two horse-drawn carriages to pass in opposite directions unless it was too crowded which invariably it was; and on either side a jumble of houses and shops precariously overhung the edges. As they approached the riverside the Doctor looked to his right at the imposing square building that stood on its own not far from the Seine.

'The Louvre, the King's council chamber and the first important covered market in France,' he observed. 'It's worth a visit.' Then he paused briefly.

'Yes?' Steven asked.

'No new bridge to the island yet. That's why it was called *le Pont Neuf*, he added, 'and started in 1578 by the King, Henri III.'

'So that puts us in the decade 67 to 77,' Steven remarked, smiling as the Doctor mopped his brow, 'on a midsummer's day.'

'A draught of chilled white wine wouldn't be amiss,' the Doctor replied, 'and there's bound to be several inns on the far side of the bridge.'

Once again they made their way among the bustling throng, being pushed and squeezed to one side as a coach with a liveried driver and a coat-of-arms emblazoned on its doors forced a path through to the island. But once on the other side of the river the crowd dispersed among the streets leading away from the bridge.

'There's one,' Steven said as he pointed to a sign with the name *Auberge du Pont Romain* hanging on the wall of a building with benches and tables outside where people stood or sat, drinking and chatting. 'Why the Roman Bridge Inn?' he asked.

'Because the Romans built the original bridge,' the Doctor replied, 'though they didn't put up any houses.

They're relatively recent, late fifteenth, early sixteerith century.'

'You seem to know French history like the back of your hand, Doctor,' Steven sounded slightly irked.

‘This period intrigues me,’ the Doctor said enigmatically as they went inside.

The main room of the inn took up the entire ground floor of the building. In opposing walls were several leaded windows with tables of varying sizes with benches or chairs spaced out across the floor. In front of the third wall stood the wooden bar behind which were casks of wine sitting on their sides in cradles, each one tapped. Set in the other wall was a wide fireplace with a mantle, in the centre of which hung a centurion’s helmet with Roman spears and sheathed stabbing swords on either side. The ceiling was low with heavy beams and in one corner a staircase led to the rooms above. Almost all of the customers were outside with only a few grouped around the bar over which presided an aging, tall, cadaverous, balding landlord in black breeches, hose, blouse and apron, who only spoke in half-whispers.

‘Your pleasure, gentlemen?’ he murmured as the Doctor and Steven approached the bar. The Doctor glanced briefly at Steven before replying.

‘Two goblets of a light white burgundy, as chilled as is possible,’ the Doctor replied.

‘That’ll be from the cask in the cellar,’ the landlord muttered, ‘as cool a place as you will find on these hot-headed August days. The lad will fetch some up,’ he added and turned to the eleven-year-old boy who was dressed identically to his master. After a brief whispered order the boy lifted the trapdoor in one corner of the bar floor and disappeared from view.

‘Now we have the month,’ Steven remarked while the Doctor studied the group of young men who sat around a table. Everything about them, except for one, exuded social position and money, their clothes, their knee boots, their swords, their rosetted or feathered hats and, above all, their nonchalant air.

The Doctor grunted, ‘Young bloods, they’re always the same anywhere, anytime.’

‘Not him,’ Steven pointed to the odd man out whose clothes and attitude were less flamboyant than the others.

‘He’s employed by one of them, possibly as a secretary, and, what’s more, I don’t think he’s French,’ the Doctor replied, ‘he doesn’t look it. More German, I’d say.’

One of the young men looked at his companions. ‘Are your glasses charged, my friends?’ he asked and without waiting for a reply called to the landlord for another carafe of wine. ‘We’ll make a toast.’

The more conservatively dressed member of the group glanced apprehensively at the Doctor and Steven and turned back to the young man who had spoken. ‘Be careful, Gaston,’ he said, covering his mouth with his hand.

Gaston also glanced at the Doctor and Steven and then laughed. ‘The trouble with you, Nicholas, is that you are too cautious.’

‘And you are too provocative,’ Nicholas replied in earnest. Gaston glanced over at the Doctor and Steven again with a smile as the landlord came to the table and refilled their goblets. Gaston picked his up as another man came into the bar. Nicholas looked at Gaston with alarm.

‘Don’t be indiscreet,’ he warned as Gaston stood up and raised his glass.

‘To Henri of Navarre, our Protestant king,’ Gaston called out.

The toast had been proposed and had to be seconded.

The others stood up, including the reluctant Nicholas, and raised their goblets. ‘To Henri of Navarre,’ they called out in unison and drank.

The man at the bar spun around to face them and grabbing the Doctor’s as yet untouched goblet of wine raised it in front of his face. ‘And to his bride of yesterday, our Catholic Princess Marguerite,’ he cried. Then he gulped down the wine in one swallow as Gaston spluttered and hit himself on the chest with a clenched fist.

The Doctor drew in his breath sharply as Gaston, recovering quickly with a cough, looked at the stranger in mild amusement and mock astonishment. ‘Simon Duval,’

he exclaimed, ‘what a surprise to find you in a tavern that’s rid of rigid Catholic dogma.’ Then he turned to the landlord. ‘Antoine-Marc, what decent wines have you to offer?’ he asked, swirling the rest of his wine around the goblet.

‘We sell the best Bordeaux to be found hereabouts, Sire,’

the landlord replied in a mumble.

‘Bordeaux. It’s such a thin Catholic concoction.’ He turned to his companions in disdain. ‘Hardly fit for the altar,’ he added.

Nicholas leant across the table in warning. ‘Gaston,’ he exclaimed as Duval took a step forward, his hand reaching for the hilt of his sword, then checked himself and eyed the group coldly.

For his part Gaston waved each arm in the air one at a time. ‘How would you rather I fought the duel, Simon?

With my right hand or my left?’ he asked nonchalantly.

Duval turned to Nicholas.

‘For a free-thinking German, Herr Muss, I congratulate you on your good sense,’ he said and inclined his head to the conservatively dressed Nicholas. ‘But I am dismayed to find you in a tavern where our Princess Marguerite is seemingly game for insult.’

Gaston raised an eyebrow. ‘Insult, Simon? I am not aware of any said or intended against the noble lady.

Indeed, quite the opposite. I asked Antoine-Marc for a wine as befits her rank and future. A bold burgundy of character, don’t you agree, Nicholas?’ he smiled at his friend who stood grim-faced across the table and then, without waiting for a reply, ordered a carafe and more glasses from the landlord.

The Doctor and Steven watched in silence as the confrontation was played out. Both Gaston and Simon Duval were tall, handsome young men who bore themselves with the authority of social status and wealth although Gaston’s air was the more languid. He was blond and fair-skinned with pale blue eyes where Simon’s complexion was more Latin and his eyes were brown. The barboy carried the tray of goblets and set it down on the table. Antoine-Marc brought over the carafe of wine and poured equal measures into each glass. Then he withdrew to safety behind the bar.

Gaston toyed with the stem of his goblet. ‘What was the toast again, Simon?’ he asked.

‘The health, Viscount Lerans, of our Catholic Princess Marguerite,’ Simon replied through clenched teeth.

‘So it was,’ Lerans replied lightly, looking around, ‘and so let it be, gentlemen.’ He raised his glass. ‘To Henri’s bride,’ he said and drank.

Duval and the others followed suit.

‘Is honour satisfied, Simon?’ Lerans asked as he reclined again in his chair.

‘For the time being, Viscount Lerans,’ Duval replied as he put down his goblet and walked to the bar. ‘I owe this gentleman a glass of white wine,’ he said, pointing to the Doctor. ‘Be so kind as to serve both him and his companion another.’ He placed a coin on the bar.

‘That’s most agreeable of you, sir,’ the Doctor replied as Duval nodded briefly to him and then, without looking at the group at the table, left the inn.

As soon as Duval had gone, Lerans burst out laughing.

His friend, Nicholas Muss, looked at him angrily. ‘Why do you provoke quarrels, Gaston?’ he demanded. ‘Aren’t things difficult enough for us as they are?’

‘I would have thought that after yesterday’s marriage we are, for the first time, my friend, in a position of strength,’

Lerans replied, ‘and the Catholics must accept that we are no longer the underdogs.’ He stood up. ‘Let’s go to the Louvre and hear the latest gossip of the Court.’ He threw a gold coin on the table and with a curt bow to the Doctor and Steven led the way out.

The Doctor and Steven watched while Antoine-Marc poured their goblets of wine. Then the Doctor picked his up and beckoned to Steven to follow him to a table where they sat down out of earshot of the landlord.

‘It is the nineteenth of August in the year 1572,’ the Doctor whispered dramatically.

‘Is that a guess or good judgement?’ Steven queried.

‘And, if the latter, what’s it based on?’

‘Their conversation.’ The Doctor glanced at the landlord pocketting the coin that Gaston had left on the table while the barboy put the empty goblets on a tray.

Then the Doctor leant forward confidentially. ‘The young Protestant King Henri of Navarre married the Catholic Princess Marguerite of

Valois on the eighteenth of August and Duval said the nuptials were celebrated yesterday.'

'Yes, I heard that,' Steven confirmed.

'In which case, this is neither a place nor a time in which to tarry,' the Doctor said categorically.

'Then drink up and we'll move on,' Steven replied. The Doctor reached across the table and grabbed Steven's hand.

'No, first there is someone here I wish to talk to,' the Doctor said and explained that it concerned a scientific matter which would hold no interest for Steven. 'A simple exchange of ideas to give me a better understanding of his work,' he concluded.

'But you've just said we should be on our way,' Steven protested.

'There's no immediate danger and I shall be gone for only a few hours at the most,' the Doctor assured him.

'What's his subject?' Steven asked, his curiosity aroused.

'He's an apothecary.' The Doctor tried to sound off-hand.

'Not struck off, by any chance?' Steven remembered the Doctor's distant look when they were in the street and the murmured 'I wonder.'

'That's – er – rather what I hope to – hum – find out,'

the Doctor answered uncomfortably.

'And you know where his shop is?' Steven persisted.

'The general area – yes,' the Doctor sounded vague.

'Then I'll help you find him,' Steven smiled. 'It'll cut the time in half and then we can be off.'

'I'd rather you didn't.' The Doctor was on the defensive.

'He's a secretive man and does not take kindly to strangers.'

'So, you know him.'

The Doctor shook his head. 'Only read about him in some half-

destroyed documents I once found. His name was Prenlin, or Preslin, and he was on to something quite important, but the documents didn't say what. As I've said, they were half-ruined and he was only a footnote.'

Steven sipped his wine. 'But an intriguing one and you want to play detective.'

The Doctor semi-smiled. 'I suppose you could put it that way,' he admitted.

'Then off you go, Doctor, and I wish you luck. But where shall we meet, and when?' Steven asked.

The Doctor thought for a moment before replying.

'Here, Steven, this evening after the Cathedral has rung the Vesper-bell which can be heard all over Paris.' He put his hand in his pocket, took out some coins and placed them on the table. 'You'll need this,' he added. 'but stay out of mischief, religion and politics.'

'The last two are one and the same from what I can gather,' Steven replied, scooping the money into his pocket.

'And spell trouble, young man, so be warned.' Then the Doctor looked at the landlord. 'Is it possible to find a carriage hereabouts, landlord?' he asked.

'There's always one or two for hire in front of Notre Dame, sir,' Antoine-Marc murmured, looking off into the middle distance. 'Shall I send the lad to fetch one?'

'No, no, we'll walk,' the Doctor replied. 'What do I owe you?'

'Nothing, sir. I took the liberty of permitting the other gentleman to pay for all four glasses. It seemed the proper thing to do,' he whispered as convincingly as he could. The Doctor stood up and left ten sous on the table.

'I'll walk with you,' Steven volunteered and together they left the auberge.

Notre Dame Cathedral stood at the back of a large square on the eastern end of the island and Steven noticed that the broad steps in front of it were completed. He remarked on the fact to the Doctor but in reply received only a noncommittal grunt. On one side of the

square were four carriages. The first three were ornate with crested doors and plumed horses. The fourth was less elaborate and the horse had a careworn air.

'That'll be the one for hire,' the Doctor observed. 'The other three must be for the clerical hierarchy, by the look of them.'

'An ecclesiastical conclave,' Steven suggested.

'And no doubt plotting some mischief in the name of God,' the Doctor added and looked up at the driver. 'Saint Martin's Gate in Montparnasse,' he ordered, then opened the door and sat down inside before looking down at Steven. 'Now, don't forget to be at the auberge...'

'After the Tocsin's sounded,' Steven completed the phrase and the Doctor looked mildly exasperated.

'Not the Tocsin, the Vesper-bell,' he said and then told the driver to move on. 'The Tocsin's a warning bell,' he threw at Steven as the carriage clattered away.

What neither of them knew was that Steven's name for the bell was by far the more accurate for both of them.

2

Echoes of Wassy

Simon Duval lurked under an archway near the bridge which gave him an uninterrupted view of the auberge and withdrew further back into the shadows as Viscount Lerans, Nicholas Muss and the remainder of their party came out and sauntered in his direction towards the bridge.

Duval strained to overhear their conversation but even their laughter was drowned out by the noises of the crowd.

He thought that it was most probably some vicious pleasantry at the expense of the Catholic princess which gave them such perverse delight. Then it was his turn to chuckle as he reminded himself how short-lived their airs and graces would be.

Shortly afterwards he watched with curiosity as the Doctor and Steven left. He wondered who they might be.

Certainly they did not appear to be Frenchmen and his inclinations were that they were English, Protestants, no doubt, in Paris to support the Huguenot cause. Why else would they have been in the *Auberge du Pont Romain* which was becoming known among Catholics as a meeting place for Huguenots?

He decided that their presence would be worth reporting to his new superior, the Abbot of Amboise, who was arriving that same evening to replace Cardinal Lorraine who had ben summoned to Rome three days before the royal wedding festivities. Duval had not yet met the Abbot but knew of him, by reputation, as a Man of God who sternly opposed all religious leanings not embraced by the Holy See.

Then he went back into the auberge. 'A word with you, landlord,' he said, pointing at Antoine-Marc as he crossed over to the bar. Antoine-Marc looked alarmed and began mumbling something about the change from the money for the strangers' drinks but Duval cut him short. 'Who were they, do you know?' he asked.

'I'd never seen them before, sir,' Antoine-Marc muttered.

'Had the others – Viscount Lerans and Nicholas Muss –

do you think?' Duval jingled some coins in his pocket.

Antoine-Marc pursed his lips. 'Not that they gave any sign, sir, but, of course, it's difficult to say these days,' he drew out the last few murmured words to emphasise them,

'what with the problems and me being a landlord obliged to serve all who enter.'

'But most of the time you know your customers?' Duval persisted.

'If you are referring to the Huguenot gentlemen, sir, oh yes, I know them well.' Antoine-Marc's whisper was sly.

'Viscount Lerans and Nicholas Muss and their associates frequently take a glass of wine here.' He raised a protesting hand. 'Not, mark you, sir, by *my* choice, but a man must live and a glass of wine down anyone's gullet, be he Catholic or Huguenot, puts two sous in my till.'

'Watch and listen and I'll put in more.' Duval was brusque as he placed some coins on the counter. Antoine-Marc inclined his head slightly, took a goblet from under the bar, placed it in front of Duval and poured in some wine from a carafe.

‘Your continued good health, sir,’ Antoine-Marc murmured as he scooped up the coins.

Steven had stood watching the Doctor’s carriage trundle away across the small bridge on the south side of the island until it was out of sight. Then he looked up at the ornate twin towers of the Cathedral in front of him and decided to go inside.

As he walked across the square he passed the three stationary carriages with their liveried drivers immobile in their seats under the broiling sun. One of the horses pawed the ground briefly with a hoot, the second switched its tail and, as Steven mounted the steps to the massive, intricately carved western entrance, the third horse nodded its plumed head.

Steven went into the shade and the coolness of the interior. Candles burned in groups on either side of the main altar and he looked around at the massive pillars decorated with tapestries and heraldic banners stretching up to the central dome high above him. There was a faint lingering fragrance of incense in the air and as he sat down in a pew he had a fleeting vision of the majestic pomp and circumstance of the previous day’s marriage.

Now Notre Dame wore a mantle of serenity. Yet Steven had seen and heard the confrontation in the auberge and the Doctor had warned him that it was not a time for them to linger in.

Involuntarily he shivered and wished that the Doctor were with him. Now, that was absurd! He’d been in scrapes before, both with and without the Doctor, in the past and in the future, on earth and in the galaxies. Yet here, in the peace and quiet of the Cathedral, he felt disquieted and decided that the sunshine outside was preferable.

As he stood up to leave he saw three clergymen hurrying along one aisle towards the door. They were richly dressed in flowing robes and capes with skull caps on their heads.

They were talking among themselves and Stephen overheard one of the priests, a well-built, rotund man, say in a booming voice: ‘... with the Most Illustrious in Rome, my Lord Abbot will allow them no shriving time, God be praised.’

One of the other two, a cadaverous man whose hands clutched the golden cross hanging around his neck, chuckled. ‘Not even a few seconds for Vespers,’ he added as they swept out through the open doorway.

The words ‘shriving time’ struck a distant chord in Steven’s memory. Hadn’t they something to do with death? he asked himself as he went out into the sweltering mid-afternoon sunlight. As he worried the phrase in his brain, his feet led him instinctively back towards the auberge.

‘It’s from a play,’ he said aloud. ‘Oh, come on, Taylor, you’ve acted in it, said those very words, “shriving time”.’

He began to sound angry as he struggled to remember.

‘When you were training to become an astronaut. Come on, think. Name the plays you were in, idiot.’ He was furious now and did not see the young girl who came running around the corner and collided with him. ‘Whoa,’ he called out as he grabbed her by the shoulders spinning both of them around to keep their balance. ‘What’s the hurry?’

The girl looked at Steven in terror then wrenched herself free from his hold and ran into the auberge. Steven, taken aback, looked at the open door but from where he stood he could not see inside.

‘Get out of my way,’ a voice snapped behind him and Steven was roughly pushed to one side.

‘Watch it,’ Steven exclaimed as the man wearing an officer’s uniform with a drawn sword and two other men with pikes stormed into the auberge. Steven moved over to the entrance and looked in.

The officer stood with his legs astride and pointed his sword around the room at the customers. ‘Where’s the girl?’ he demanded.

Viscount Lerans, Nicholas Muss and their friends were seated back at their table with goblets of wine. Lerans had his feet on the table.

‘Don’t point that thing at me, fellow,’ said Lerans. His light tone carried a hint of menace as he lowered his feet leisurely one at a time to the floor.

‘I am the Most Illustrious Cardinal Lorraine’s officer of the guard and my orders are to apprehend the girl.’ The officer tried to sound impressive. ‘So where is she?’

‘Well, *I* am the Viscount Lerans,’ he replied nonchalantly as he stood up and rested his hand on the hilt of his sword, ‘and I’m curious to know why three grown-up, armed men should be pursuing a slip of a

girl.'

'She is a serving wench, Sire, who has run away from the Most Illustrious Cardinal's house and I am to fetch her back,' the officer replied.

'But he's away, isn't he?' Lerans bantered.

'Who, Sire?'

'Lorraine. In Rome or somewhere.' Lerans glanced at Muss for confirmation. The officer drew in his breath sharply but realised that a sword and two pikes were no match for the young men around the table.

'She has been assigned to the Abbot of Amboise's staff,'

the officer persisted.

Lerans studied the tip of one of his boots before replying. 'If she cared so little for one cleric's service as to run away, I doubt that she'd fare any better in another's,'

he chuckled. 'Above all, that of Amboise.'

'Is the girl here, Sire?' The officer chose to ignore the scarcely veiled insults.

'Yes,' Lerans replied, 'she's crouched under the bar.'

Antoine-Marc who stood behind it, looked alarmed.

'Seize her,' the officer ordered the pikemen.

'No,' Lerans countermanded sharply, 'leave her be.'

The officer hesitated before turning back to him.

'Viscount Lerans, my Lord the Abbot of Amboise shall learn of this occurrence when he arrives this evening and he will no doubt act accordingly.'

'No doubt,' Lerans agreed affably and the officer of the guard with his two pikemen turned on their heels and left the auberge.

Steven stood to one side to let them pass. Then Lerans saw him. 'Ah, this morning's stranger,' he called out and turned to Muss: 'Remember

him, Nicholas, when we made sport with Simon Duval?' Without waiting for a reply he turned back to Steven. 'Come and join us,' he offered.

Steven crossed the room towards them. 'What will you do about the girl?' he asked as Antoine-Marc brought another goblet from the bar.

'Oh, yes, the girl,' Lerans exclaimed in mock surprise.

'I'd forgotten about her.' He clapped his hands. 'You can stand up now, wench,' he called and the girl rose cautiously from behind the bar. 'Come here, no harm'll fall upon you.'

The girl edged her way towards the table while Antoine-Marc filled Steven's goblet. 'You shouldn't play those sort of games here, Sire,' the landlord half-whispered to Lerans.

'It'll give my establishment a bad reputation.'

'A bad one!' Lerans laughed as he sank back into his chair and pointed at the girl: 'As a defender of helpless maidens, how can that possibly be bad?' He indicated a chair and invited Steven to sit down. 'English, aren't you and in Paris for yesterday's celebrations?'

'English, yes, but we only arrived today and are just passing through,' Steven replied.

Lerans picked up his goblet. 'Where is your friend, the older man?'

'He's gone to Montparnasse to visit an apothecary.'

Behind the bar Antoine-Marc had pricked up his ears.

Lerans raised his eyebrows. 'Is he sick?' he asked and added that there were plenty of apothecaries in the immediate neighbourhood. Steven explained that his friend was a doctor and that the visit was a professional one, an exchange of ideas.

Muss's eyes narrowed. 'A *practising* apothecary?' he enquired.

'I don't know,' Steven replied.

'What's his name?'

Steven thought for a moment. 'The Doctor did mention it. Premlin, something like that.'

‘Preslin, Charles Preslin,’ Muss stated. ‘A Huguenot.’

Lerans snorted with delight. ‘Nicholas was fishing to subtly discover whether you’re pro-Catholic or for us.’

Steven smiled. ‘I’m neutral,’ he said.

‘We, as you may have gathered, are not.’ Lerans glanced at the girl who stood meekly beside the table. ‘And baiting Catholics is my favourite sport.’

‘So I’ve noticed,’ Steven admitted with a laugh. Lerans picked up his goblet. ‘Here’s a toast to your Queen Bess, our ally, long may she reign’. They all rose and drank to Queen Elizabeth’s health. Then he turned his attention to the girl. ‘What’s your name, child?’ he asked.

‘Anne Chaplet,’ she replied.

‘In the service of the Most Illustrious Cardinal Lorraine.’ He made the title sound ludicrous. ‘Yet a good Catholic girl like you runs away – why?’

‘I’m not a Catholic, sir,’ Anne’s mouth was set stubbornly.

Lerans looked at the others and then at her in astonishment. ‘You’re a Huguenot,’ he exclaimed.

‘Yes, sir,’ she replied proudly.

Lerans chortled. ‘We must send you back,’ he rubbed his hands together gleefully, ‘and have a spy in the household.’

‘Oh, no, sir, please not that,’ she begged. ‘I don’t know would what they would do to me.’

‘For running away? A good thrashing, I suppose.’

Lerans’ manner was only half-teasing. ‘But now that you’re in contact with us, it’d be worth it, surely?’

‘But it wouldn’t be for running away, sir, it’d be for something I overheard.’

Everyone around the table glanced at one another before leaning towards her, their faces serious.

‘What did you overhear, Anne?’ Lerans measured out his words.

‘Wassy,’ she replied. Steven did not understand but the others obviously did.

‘What about Wassy?’ Lerans’s voice hardened.

‘It might happen again before the week’s out,’ she said, wringing her hands. There was a catch in her voice as she added: ‘That’s where I come from and that’s where my father was murdered.’

Lerans reached out, placed his hands on Anne’s shoulders, and looked directly into her eyes. ‘It’s very, very important, Anne, that you remember every word you overheard.’

Anne nodded and took a deep breath: ‘I was walking along a corridor in the servants’ quarters, the one where the Cardinal’s guards are housed, and I passed their door which was open. There were two men in the room. One of them was the officer who came here to take me back and the other was a man I didn’t know but the officer called him Roger when he said that there’d be more celebrations before the week was out and that it’d be just like Wassy all over again.’

Steven broke the ensuing silence. ‘May I ask where Wassy is and what happened there?’

Nicholas Muss told him that Wassy was a small town about two hundred kilometres to the east of Paris. In March, 1562, some soldiers under the leadership of the staunchly Catholic Duke Francois de Guise had massacred twenty-five Huguenots who were attending a service in their Reform Church there. Steven glanced at Anne.

‘My brother and I escaped by clambering up into the loft and jumping from the roof onto a hayrick before the Church was set on fire,’ she said simply. ‘My father was not so lucky.’

‘It was the spark which ignited the Religious Wars in France,’ Muss added, ‘and there have been sporadic out-breaks of violence all over the country ever since. Francois de Guise was assassinated within the year. Sudden death without time to confess became the rule of thumb between Huguenots and Catholics. But we hope that yesterday’s marriage will bring about a reconciliation.’

Suddenly a chord was struck in Steven’s brain. He knew the play where he had spoken those lines mentioning shriving time. They were from *Hamlet*. He had played the Prince who, plotting revenge for his father’s murder, cries out:

‘He should those bearers put to sudden death Not shriving time allowed.’

Of course: ‘shriving time’–the time allowed to a condemned man so that he may make peace with God before his execution.

What had the cleric said? ‘with the Most Illustrious in Rome, [Steven now knew who he was] my Lord Abbot will allow them no shriving time.’ The other priest had added:

‘Not even a few seconds for Vespers.’ Combined with Anne’s story, it could only mean a Catholic conspiracy against ‘them’. But who were ‘them’? He decided to let Gaston and Nicholas solve that one.

‘Now, let me tell you what I overheard earlier this afternoon’, Steven said, remembering not to mention a play that hadn’t yet been written. ‘It was meaningless to me until I heard what Anne had to say.’ He repeated word for word the incident in the Cathedral.

There was a long silence after he had finished which was finally broken by Lerans who looked at Anne and then at Muss. ‘Safe-keeping for the girl, Nicholas, where?’ His voice was brisk, authoritative.

‘The Admiral’s house,’ Muss replied without hesitation.

‘Where better than the residence of the Queen Mother’s closest advisor?’ He turned to Steven: ‘Admiral de Coligny, he’s a Huguenot, one of us, and as his secretary, I can keep an eye on her.’

Lerans looked at two of his young companions.

‘Fabrice, you and Alain take her there,’ he ordered before turning to Steven. ‘Now, what about you, Englishman?’ He paused and then smiled. ‘Forgive my ill manners, I have not introduced myself nor asked your name.’ He bowed his head slightly. ‘I am Gaston, Viscount Lerans, the personal aide to His Majesty, Henri of Navarre.’

‘My name’s Steven Taylor,’ Steven said and, half-raising his hands in a mild protest, added, ‘but I’m not involved.

I’ve told you all I know and now I’m waiting for my friend, the Doctor, to return as we’re both just passing through.’

‘Then I wish you well and a safe journey home,’ Lerans replied and turned to the others. ‘Gentlemen, we have matters to attend to.’ He walked over to the bar and place a coin on it. ‘That should be

sufficient, I think, including a glass each for the Englishman and his friend when he comes back,' he said and, followed by Muss and the remaining companion, went outside. Antoine-Marc pocketed the coin and thought how much more would be coming to him when next he spoke to Simon Duval.

Once they were on the street Lerans took Muss by the arm. 'Them,' he said urgently and repeated it. 'Us? All of us? That's unthinkable: we're more than ten thousand strong in Paris.'

'Then a faction,' Muss replied. 'Not your master for that would bring about a catastrophe for both causes.'

'I agree. But nonetheless a group of us has been selected for the Abbot's justice.' Lerans almost spat out the last word.

'But which one?' Muss spread his hands in despair.

'If I were a Catholic – which merciful Heaven I'm not –

I would consider that the most contentious Huguenots, more so than our clergy, are those whose theories and experiments had them disenabled in '67,' Lerans replied.

'The apothecaries!' Muss exclaimed.

Lerans pointed back at the auberge. 'And if what that young Englishman said is true, we have only a few hours in which to warn them.'

'Until Vespers.'

'So we've no time to waste.'

They both strode off purposefully, forgetting that the Doctor had gone to exchange ideas with a Huguenot apothecary named Preslin.

3

The Apothecary

The windows were open yet the heat inside the carriage was stifling as it rattled across the cobblestone streets towards the Sorbonne, jiggling the Doctor about and making him perspire profusely. But his physical discomfort was far outweighed by the curiosity which had led him to make the spur-of-the-moment decision to visit Charles Preslin.

The carriage came to a halt and the driver, leaning over, looked down. 'That'll be twenty sous,' he said and the Doctor handed him thirty as he stepped out. The driver tipped his hat, shook the reins and the carriage rumbled away.

The Doctor looked around him. The Sorbonne tower stood in the centre of a small circus from which six busy streets radiated like the spokes of a wheel. The Doctor studied each of them in turn, looking for the mortar and pestle sign of an apothecary. He could see three such signs within the first thirty metres, all in different streets, and set off to investigate each one in turn, knowing that, regardless of the one he chose to begin with, the shop he wanted would be the third.

Which, of course, it was and, moreover, it was closed and had been for some considerable time by the state of it.

The window shutters were closed, the door locked and the nameplate barely legible but the Doctor managed to discern the name *Chas. Preslin*.

He moved back into the centre of the crowded street to obtain a better overall view of the building. It was a two storey house similar to the ones they had seen when they left the TARDIS on the rubbish dump. There were two windows on each floor and three of them were shuttered.

The fourth and smallest was the top one on the lefthand side. At least someone lived there, the Doctor thought and noticed a narrow lane between two houses a few metres further down the street. 'I'll try the back door,' the Doctor muttered to himself and walked towards it, counting front doors on the way.

The length of the lane was littered with rubbish and opened out onto a general area of wasteland between the backs of the houses. Some people had tried to cultivate their small patches of soil in which vegetables struggled to grow. Others kept pigs or hens in compounds and there were a few tethered goats. The Doctor put his handkerchief to his nose as he made his way among the washing lines slung between the back windows and poles stuck in the earth. He counted back doors as he went along until he reached the one he calculated would be Preslin's. He knocked on it with his cane and waited. No one came to the door so he looked up and saw that all the windows were shuttered. He knocked again but there was still no reply.

'There's no good you doing that, he won't come to the door,' a rosy-

cheeked, stout woman announced from her window in the house next door as she prodded some washing out onto the line with a stick.

The Doctor looked up at her and raised his hat. ‘Pray, how does one attract Monsieur Preslin’s attention, madam?’

‘You open the door and you go inside,’ she replied.

‘Thank you, madam,’ the Doctor said and did as she had advised, closing the door behind him.

Enough light filtered through the rear shutters toallow the Doctor to make out his surroundings. The room appeared to be an abandoned laboratory with bottles, jars, phials and jugs stacked on several shelves around the walls.

In the middle of the room there was a table, covered with dust with mortars and pestles and measuring instruments lying on it. There was a door which the Doctor decided led to the shop so he opened it and went into the short corridor which lay beyond.

On his right was a narrow staircase winding up to the floors above. The Doctor stood still and listened. He could hear no sounds. ‘Monsieur Preslin,’ he called out and waited. There was no reply. ‘Charles Preslin,’ he repeated but again there was only silence. He sighed and opened the door in front of him. He was right. It led to the shop with its dust-covered counter and cobwebbed shelves. He went back into the corridor and mounted the stairs. He looked into both rooms on the first floor. One of them was a bedroom and the other appeared to be a library. He went up to the second floor and opened the door of the room with the open shutter. A man sat at a desk by the window.

He was writing with a quill pen in a ledger and several sheets of paper lay on the desk. The man did not look up as the Doctor came into the room.

‘Is that you, David?’ he asked, his pen still scratching on the parchment.

‘No, it’s not,’ the Doctor replied and waited as the man carefully laid down his pen on the desk and then slowly, as if preparing himself for a shock, turned around as he removed the small half-spectacles from the tip of his nose.

‘And who may you be, sir?’ he asked quietly and politely.

‘A doctor,’ the Doctor replied.

‘There are many such,’ the man replied as he stood up,

‘with clothes of different cuts, medicine, philosophy, the sciences, even the arts.’ He studied the Doctor’s cape for a moment before asking what lay under it. The Doctor flicked it back off his shoulders and the man stared at him for a while before speaking. ‘A strange attire,’ he observed finally.

The Doctor smiled. ‘Of my own design,’ he said. ‘I travel a lot and cannot abide discomfort.’ Then he hesitated fractionally before asking, ‘You *are* Charles Preslin, I presume?’

‘A doctor of what, did you say?’ the man said as the Doctor took stock of him. He was in his fifties, of average height, slim, balding with shoulder-length straggling grey hair and with intelligent eyes in a careworn race.

‘Actually, I didn’t say,’ the Doctor replied and then smiled, ‘a bit of everything, really, a doctor of dabbling, I suppose, who’s looking for an apothecary named Charles Preslin.’

‘To what end?’ the man asked.

‘It refers to a footnote I read in a scientific journal,’ the Doctor explained and the man smiled wryly.

‘Oh, that,’ he said and, admitting that he was Preslin, continued, ‘it dates back to ’66 when a few colleagues and I were engaged in some research. It was just before the certificate of Catholicisation was brought into force. And that, of course, put paid to our work.’

‘Which was?’ the Doctor asked innocently.

Preslin’s eyes darkened with suspicion and, stretching his left arm out, he raised his forefinger and waved it like a metronome in front of the Doctor’s face. ‘Tch-tch-tch,’ he clicked with his tongue, ‘you do not catch me out like that, sir. I am too old and wily to confess conveniently to heresy.’

‘I assure you, Monsieur Preslin, that was far from my intention.’ The Doctor’s indignation was suddenly broken by the sound of feet hurrying up the stairs. An armed, heavily-set man barged breathlessly into the room.

‘The ferrets are abroad, Charles,’ he gasped before he saw the Doctor. ‘Who’s he?’ he demanded, his hand moving to the hilt of his sword.

‘A weasel, perhaps, I don’t know. But he’s been asking questions,’ Preslin replied.

The man half-drew his sword. ‘They’re using the Abbot’s arrival as an excuse to round us up. So let’s despatch him and leave his carcass to the ferrets.’

‘Just a minute,’ the Doctor cut in angrily. ‘I came here in good faith to talk to Monsieur Preslin and now I’m being called a weasel and you’re proposing to leave my body for the ferrets. I have no idea of what you’re talking about.’

Preslin hesitated before admitting that the Doctor might be telling the truth.

‘And if he’s not?’ the other one asked. ‘He’ll tell the ferrets our escape route. No, we can’t risk it.’ He was adamant and took a step towards the Doctor as he drew his sword.

‘Put up your sword, David,’ Preslin spoke sharply and then turned to the Doctor. ‘I must oblige you to come with us, sir,’ he said.

‘That’s folly,’ David protested, pointing his sword at the Doctor.

‘If he’s innocent, he’ll have time to prove it,’ Preslin replied, ‘and if we find he’s guilty, well then, nothing’s lost. Just keep an eye on him, David, whilst I tidy up.’

As Preslin busied himself at the desk, the Doctor asked questions. He wanted to know who the ferrets and weasels were and was told they were two species of Catholic militants, both as unpleasant as they were dangerous.

Preslin closed the shutters and went into the other room to collect his jacket.

‘I know your face. I’ve seen it before,’ David remarked unpleasantly. ‘It was a long time ago when you were younger. Say, ten years. About then...’

The Doctor shook his head. ‘You’re very much mistaken, sir,’ he replied. ‘We’ve never met until now and, once I have secured my release, you may rest assured that you will never see me again.’

‘I’ve met this man,’ David said aggressively to Preslin as he came back into the room.

‘Where?’ Preslin asked, eyeing the Doctor with renewed suspicion.

‘I don’t remember – yet. It was not a pleasant encounter, that much I can recall.’ David’s voice was filled with menace. ‘But I’ll get it, have no doubt.’

‘Lead the way down the stairs. But prudently,’ Preslin advised the Doctor as David indicated the open door with his sword. It occurred to the Doctor that he might just have time enough to slam it shut in their faces. ‘And don’t touch the door whatever you think to do,’ Preslin added for good measure.

They went downstairs and stood in the corridor. Preslin opened the door into the shop and beckoned the Doctor to go through.

‘I still think you are mistaken to insist that he accompanies us,’ David stated as they passed into the shop.

‘We’ll debate it later,’ Preslin replied as he crossed over to a shelf behind the counter and, lifting off a large jar filled with dark green liquid, pressed the panel of wood behind it. A section of shelves the width of a door swung silently open. Beyond it was a flight of stone stairs leading downwards. Preslin took a taper from under the counter and lit it. Then the three of them left the shop and went down the stairs with Preslin carefully pulling the secret entrance shut after him.

With the flickering taper as their only light they made their way carefully down the steps until they reached the side of a narrow tunnel which led away in both directions.

In front, the Doctor hesitated at the entrance.

‘Turn left,’ Preslin said and they made their way along the tunnel. The Doctor noted that there was a slight cool dry breeze and that several other sets of stairs led into the tunnel. They walked without talking, their footsteps reverberating off the walls into the distance. Suddenly they saw another flickering taper ahead of them.

‘Jules?’ Preslin called.

‘Yes, Charles?’ echoed the reply.

‘Are there many others?’ David shouted.

A peal of laughter came bouncing off the walls towards them followed by the same voice: ‘You know how swiftly Lerans and Muss can move.’

Lerans and Muss: the Doctor immediately recognised the names and thought he could see a ray of light in the tunnels of his mind, a way to extricate himself from the predicament in which he found himself. ‘The gentleman’s referring to Viscount Gaston Lerans and his friend, Nicholas Muss, I believe,’ he said.

‘You know them?’ Preslin asked.

‘Coincidentally,’ the Doctor tried to sound nonchalant.

‘This afternoon, just before I came to see you, my companion and I drank a goblet of wine with them in the Roman Bridge Inn.’

‘How fortuitous,’ David replied sarcastically, ‘that you just happened to be in the right place at the right time.’

‘Did you speak to them?’ Preslin asked.

‘Not exactly, no,’ the Doctor conceded. ‘They were having an altercation with a man named Simon Duval.’

‘That pig!’ The words erupted from David’s mouth.

‘What was the row about?’ Preslin put the question quietly in an effort to calm down David. The Doctor told him everything that had happened whilst he was at the Inn. David laughed at Lerans’s jibes to Duval.

‘Lerans is a bold one, a man after my own heart,’ he exclaimed.

‘But lacking in discretion,’ Preslin said.

‘Exactly what Nicholas Muss remarked,’ the Doctor added.

‘No matter, Lerans has the Admiral’s protection and that’s as good as the Queen Mother’s.’ David was scornful of Preslin’s concern. ‘Only by the law can they catch us out, which is why there are ferrets and weasels,’ he emphasised the word, ‘in our midst.’

Beyond the taper in front of them was a faint glow of light and the Doctor became aware of the murmur of voices. Then the taper disappeared to the right.

‘It sounds as though everyone was warned in time,’

Preslin remarked as the light became brighter and the voices louder.

They reached the end of the tunnel and on turning to the right entered a large, well-lit vaulted cave. There were tables laden with bread, cheeses, cold meats and flasks of wine, drawn from the casks which lined one side. There were at least fifty people in the cave – men, women and children – and the air was filled with the babble of voices as the children played, the women prepared food or came from or went into small cubicles which were cut into the walls, and then stood and talked among themselves.

'What have you there, Charles?' a heavy-set bearded man asked Preslin as they came into the cave. He indicated the Doctor.

'He claims he's a traveller, passing through, who came to talk to me about my work,' Preslin replied.

'Not one word of which I believe,' David's voice rang out in hatred. 'He's a spy, a Catholic spy, a weasel sent among us by Charles de Guise, the Most Illustrious Cardinal of Lorraine.' One of the listeners, a man of medium height and flaming red hair, rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

'You're talking rubbish,' the Doctor retorted angrily.

'What Charles Preslin has said is the truth.'

'The tale you've told him', retaliated David, 'but I know your face.'

'As I do,' the red-haired man said as deep laughter began to rumble up from his belly. 'He's not a spy, he's much more than that.'

'Then who is he?' David cried and the red-haired man beckoned him over and whispered in his ear.

'I knew it!' David shouted in exultation, looking at the Doctor with undisguised hatred. 'I'll despatch him now.'

'No,' the red-haired man ordered. 'We can put him to better use.'

'Who is he?' Preslin asked. Before David could answer the red-haired man hushed him and then beckoned Preslin to his side and whispered in his ear. Preslin looked at the Doctor in disbelief and dismay as one man whispered to the next. Then they all drew their swords and stared at the Doctor.

‘Whosoever you think I am, I am not,’ the Doctor said in exasperation. ‘Now kindly allow me to leave as I have an important rendezvous by Notre Dame at Vespers.’

All the men hooted with laughter ad Preslin went over to the Doctor.

‘It is one, I fear, you will not keep, my lord,’ he said gently but with venom in his voice. ‘So pray, be seated.’

The Doctor looked around, took the situation into account and did the only thing possible. He sat down.

4

Double Trouble

In spite of the disagreeable confrontation with Lerans and his companions at the auberge, Simon Duval sat at his desk in the Cardinal’s palace and was not dissatisfied with his day’s work so far. He had despatched troops to round up the dissident Huguenot apothecaries in accordance with the Abbot of Amboise’s orders and he had prepared a brief document for his new master’s perusal on the presence of the two strangers he had encountered in the auberge.

But by mid-afternoon his day had taken a turn for the worse. The Captain of the Guard, accompanied by a flabby young man whose name was Roger Colbert, came to report Anne Chaplet’s flight and rescue by, of all people, Viscount Lerans. Duval was livid with rage.

‘You dolt, you blundering imbecile, to permit him to make a fool of you, of all of us,’ he ranted.

‘There were too many of them,’ the Captain blustered,

‘we’d’ve been killed.’

‘Perhaps a better fate than that which may lie in store for you,’ Duval snarled, then took a deep breath and spoke with icy calm. ‘Why did the wench run away?’

The Captain exchanged a nervous glance with Colbert before clearing his throat. ‘It may have been because she overheard something we said.’

‘But couldn’t possibly have understood, sir,’ Colbert hastened to add while rubbing his plump, sweaty hands together.

Duval looked straight through him and said, ‘If she didn’t why did she run?’ He turned back to the Captain and asked him what it was they were discussing that could have frightened her. The Captain shook his head and was at a loss for words.

‘Oh my life, I can’t say, sir,’ he confessed.

‘ *For* your life, try harder,’ Duval replied and leant back in his chair, linking his hands and putting his forefingers to his lips.

‘The celebrations?’ the Captain half-asked Colbert, glancing at him nervously.

‘Yes, yesterday’s celebrations,’ Colbert mumbled.

‘Nothing to frighten the wench there,’ Duval tapped his lips gently with his fingertips, ‘so you must’ve said something specific. What was it?’

The Captain rubbed his forehead for several seconds before replying hesitantly: ‘One of us may have mentioned Wassy.’

‘I – er – I remember the – er – town being – er – referred to,’ Colbert stammered.

‘There’s nothing to fear in that,’ Duval began and stopped abruptly before continuing in measured tones,

‘unless, of course, she’s a Huguenot.’

The Captain licked his lips and Colbert hung his head.

‘Is she?’ Duval whispered before exploding. ‘ *Is she*?’ he roared, jumping to his feet. ‘In the Most Illustrious Cardinal’s palace, a Huguenot wench!’

Both the Captain and Colbert took a step backwards.

‘I have never been aware of her religious inclinations, sir,’ the Captain burbled.

‘You, the Captain of the Most Illustrious Cardinal’s personal guard, are not aware of the religious attitudes of his staff. Then I shall tell you. Yes, she is a Huguenot, she must be a Huguenot – for why else would Lerans defy you to defend her?’ Duval rose from behind his desk, walked to the front of it and prodded the Captain’s chest with his forefinger. ‘You are dismissed, reduced to the ranks,’ he shouted, ‘and

your first duty as a common soldier will be to provide me by five of the clock this afternoon with a detailed report on the wench, naming any family or relatives and where they may be found. Now, get out, both of you!'

After they had fled the room, Duval walked over to the window and stared down at the courtyard below. The girl had to be located and recaptured, if possible, by the time the Abbot was installed. Then he remembered the landlord at the auberge and, grabbing his jacket, hurried out of the palace.

Antoine-Marc's memory needed a little monetary jogging before it recalled that Anne had been taken by two of Lerans's companions to the Admiral de Coligny's house for safe-keeping. Duval was furious, knowing that it would be difficult to prise her out of there, but his rage almost knew no bounds when he returned to his office and learnt that not one dissident Huguenot apothecary had been taken in the afternoon raids. As the Commander put it with a shrug of his shoulders, they had all simply disappeared.

'I send you out to arrest twenty-three men and you come back empty-handed!' Duval shouted. 'Why didn't you bring in their wives or their children as hostages?'

'They'd gone too,' the luckless Commander replied.

Duval threw himself into the chair behind his desk and drummed his fingers on its surface before dismissing the Commander with the wave of a hand. Once he was alone he took stock of the situation. It was not satisfactory, far from it. He would be forced to report that not a single Huguenot apothecary was behind bars and, knowing the Abbot's reputation as a disciplinarian, he directed his thoughts to a matter of much greater importance – saving his own skin.

He was still struggling with the problem when at five o'clock the ex-Captain of the Guard reported that Anne Chaplet's only family – and this from hearsay among the kitchen staff – was a brother, Raoul, and an aunt, name unknown, both of whom lived in Paris.

'Find them and arrest them,' Duval ordered, 'and the sooner the better.' The former Captain of the Guard saluted him and left hurriedly.

Duval buckled on his sword and put on his plumed hat to attend Vespers at Notre Dame where he would meet the Abbot of Amboise. At least, he tried to convince himself, he was going with something

favourable, however slight, to report.

Steven had passed away the afternoon visiting the Louvre but his pleasure had been marred by a nagging concern for the Doctor. It wasn't anything he could put his finger on and he had tried to push it out of his mind but it was still there as he made his way back across *le Grand Pont* amongst the crowd, pushing and jostling its way towards the Cathedral. A carriage squeezed Steven with a lot of others to one side and inside it he recognised Simon Duval.

The Vespers Bell began to clang out its call to prayer and Steven found himself being swept past the auberge towards Notre Dame. He tried to fight against the human tide but it was impossible and he was carried along with it to the square in front of the Cathedral. Soldiers armed with pikes held back the crowd to leave a path along which the carriages of dignitaries attending the service could approach the Cathedral steps.

Trumpeters and heralds stood on either side of the doors and as each carriage drew up at the foot of the steps, the occupant would be greeted with a fanfare befitting his rank. Several drew shouts from the crowd. 'Tavannes,' they cried to one who waved his plumed hat in recognition.

'Guise,' to another, a name which Steven already knew, and then 'Anne, Anne,' to a middle-aged woman whose two handmaidens daintily lifted the front of her full, embroidered skirt so that she would not trip as she mounted the steps.

Steven spotted Duval standing by the doorway with two of the three clergymen he had seen in the Cathedral earlier

– the rotund priest with the booming voice and the cadaverous one, still clutching his cross, as they inclined their heads to the dignitaries entering the Cathedral.

Then the crowd fell silent as the last carriage rumbled into view. It was a four-wheeled open wagon drawn by four grey horses hand-led by liveried lackeys. On either side walked six acolytes swinging thuribles filled with smoking, perfumed incense. An ermine-trimmed, silken canopy, laced with golden thread sheltered the ornate throne that sat on the lavishly carpeted floor of the wagon.

On the throne sat the Abbot of Amboise in his black and white robes with the cowl thrown back off his head.

He was looking from side to side, making discreet signs of the cross to the crowd who stood silently in awe.

But Steven and Duval gawped at the Abbot in incredulity, scarcely able to believe the evidence of their eyes.

There was no mistaking the Abbot's features. Simon Duval was staring at the white-haired old man whose glass he had taken in the auberge, while Steven's attention was riveted on the Doctor.

5

The Proposition

During the Vesper's service Steven stood on the Cathedral square in a state of shock. What was the Doctor playing at?

he asked himself. So absorbed was he in his search for an answer that he was unaware of the soldiers pushing back him and the crowd to clear a path to the Cardinal's palace where the Abbot would be taken when he came out of Notre Dame.

The service ended and the Abbot stood on the steps in front of the Cathedral to bless the crowd before being helped up to the throne on the wagon. As the liveried lackeys led the horses past Steven, he tried to catch the Doctor's eye but to no avail and the procession passed him by.

On the other hand, Simon Duval was stunned with admiration by the Abbot's audacity to seek out, in disguise, Lerans and Muss, the right-hand men of the two most influential Huguenots in France, King Henri of Navarre and the Admiral de Coligny. When Lerans and Muss saw the Abbot again, Duval decided, they would laugh on the other side of their faces at their jests against the Princess.

But more important to him, hadn't the Abbot observed how he had defended Princess Marguerite's honour at the auberge and had he not refilled the Abbot's glass courteously afterwards? The failures of the afternoon, the apothecaries and the wench, were not of his making, others had failed him and so, with a sigh of relief, he realised he had nothing to fear from his first official encounter with the Abbot of Amboise.

There were others in the crowd who watched the proceedings with cold, curious eyes recording the names and rank of those who, as a mark of obeisance to the Abbot, attended the service. It was

information which would be passed on swiftly to their masters in the English, Dutch and Spanish Courts.

As the crowd dispersed Steven made his way back to the auberge and waited for the Doctor until Antoine-Marc came over to his table and whispered that it was time to leave.

'But I'm waiting for my friend,' Steven protested, 'we agreed to meet here.'

'Can't help that,' Antoine-Marc murmured. 'I'm about to shut so you must go.'

Steven thought for a moment. 'This *is* an auberge?' he asked.

'It is,' Antoine-Marc muttered.

'Then I'll take a room for the night,' Steven replied.

Antoine-Marc hesitated and then smiled, 'I'll need your papers,' he confided, 'it's the law.'

Instinctively Steven felt his pockets. 'I don't have any with me,' he admitted, adding that where he came from people weren't obliged to carry them.

'Things are different here,' Antoine-Marc's whisper had a note of menace, 'and no papers, no room.'

'But I'm sure my friend will arrive soon,' Steven said, trying to convince himself as much as Antoine-Marc.

'In which case you'll meet him on the street,' Antoine-Marc muttered with finality.

Steven shrugged, stood up and went outside to wait.

The door shut behind him and he heard the bolts being slid into place. He watched as the window shutters were closed and then, with a sigh, he leant against the wall. He could go back to the TARDIS but he hadn't a key and he certainly didn't fancy spending the night waiting for the Doctor on a rubbish dump.

The heat of the day had gone, it was still light and the evening air was balmy so Steven decided to walk to the riverside. As he did, the bells from the Cathedral clanged out again which made him curious about the service as no one was on the streets.

Suddenly he realised he was alone. Where he and the Doctor had been jostled and shoved during the day, not a solitary soul was in sight. And the bell still rang out. Then the truth struck. The bell must be a tocsin, a warning, and the empty streets told him there must be a curfew. As he had no shelter he decided to wait under one of the archways near the bridge which gave him cover and a view of the auberge in case the Doctor should arrive.

It grew dusk and Steven, leaning against the side of the archway, rapidly became bored. He had given up trying to figure out the Doctor's game and why he should choose to impersonate the Abbot of Amboise but he knew he would not see him before morning and the night stretched endlessly ahead of him. Then the point of a pike pricked the small of his back.

'What are you doing here?' he was asked gruffly.

'Holding up the arch,' Steven replied nonchalantly as he braced himself.

'Don't be funny with me,' the voice replied as the pike prodded Steven's back. The soldier's arms are extended, Steven thought, and he swung one arm in a downwards and sideways stroke to knock the halberd away from his back a split second before he spun around to grab the shaft and pivot it upwards to hit the soldier on the side of his head.

Caught off balance by the blow, the soldier hit the other side of his head against the wall and, releasing the pike, slumped to the ground. Steven snatched the pike and held it like a staff in front of him as two other soldiers ran at him from the shadows. He fended off their initial attack with seesaw blows of the staff, disarming one of them. The other soldier came back to the attack as Steven switched his grip on the pike to hold it by one end and swung it violently like a pendulum which sent the soldier's pike flying from his hands.

Steven heard applause behind him and he turned around to face four more pikemen with a young officer, his sword cradled in his elbow as he clapped his hands.

'Prettily done, sir,' the officer said, taking his sword by the hilt. 'I admire your mettle but I think you'd find us too many.' Steven heard the soldier behind him picking up his pike so he threw down the one he held which was quickly grabbed by the other soldier scrambling to his knees.

‘Now, tell me what you are doing here?’ the officer asked.

‘I was sheltering,’ Steven replied and explained about being refused a room at the auberge.

‘And you have no papers?’

Steven shook his head and the officer turned to the soldiers.

‘Take him to the prison at the Cardinal’s palace,’ he ordered and smiled at Steven. ‘You’ll find a room there.’

The Doctor had sat fuming for too long. He was sick to death of being stared at and being the butt of some secret joke as every protest he made was received with hoots of derisory laughter. Then to his astonishment a small carriage with a driver and drawn by two Alsation dogs came into the room.

‘What happened?’ Charles, the bearded, red-haired man demanded as the driver stepped out of the carriage and glanced nervously at the Doctor.

‘He – he – was there,’ the driver stuttered.

‘How could that be when he’s here?’ David roared, pointing at the Doctor.

‘I saw him with my own eyes,’ the driver, a small middle-aged man, protested. ‘He went into Notre Dame for Vespers.’

All eyes turned to the Doctor as he jumped to his feet.

‘ *Who* went into the Cathedral for Vespers?’ he demanded in his most authoritative voice.

‘You did, but apparently you didn’t, Doctor,’ Preslin replied lamely.

‘I have insisted throughout this ordeal,’ the Doctor paused for dramatic effect, ‘that I am not the person you presume me to be.’

Preslin looked embarrassed and then began to chuckle.

‘Forgive us, Doctor,’ he said, ‘but it would seem that you bear an uncanny resemblance to our mortal enemy, the Abbot of Amboise.’

‘I was convinced you were he, sir,’ admitted Charles.

‘Forgive me.’

‘And I also knew I’d seen your face before,’ David conceded.

The Doctor looked around the silent room and his eyes began to twinkle. ‘No harm’s been done, gentlemen, other than the fact that I am a little late for my rendezvous. But if someone would kindly escort me up to the streets and fetch me a carriage, I’ll take my leave of you.’

‘That’s impossible, Doctor,’ Preslin said.

‘Why so, Preslin?’ The Doctor was indignant once again.

‘There is a curfew until dawn,’ Preslin replied, ‘and no one may go abroad.’

‘Not even your Abbot of Amboise’s apparent double?’

the Doctor snapped.

Preslin shook his head and explained that the Catholic militia roamed the streets by night and he would not want to place the Doctor’s safety in jeopardy. ‘You may continue your journey tomorrow morning,’ he added and then smiled. ‘My colleagues and I will spend the night discussing our work with you, if you wish.’

‘Hmm,’ the Doctor replied and, deciding that Steven could take care of himself, agreed. Preslin called for food and wine and the apothecaries sat down around the table with the Doctor.

But the Doctor failed to notice the bearded, red-headed man named Charles draw the driver to one side and whisper in his ear. The driver nodded, clambered into the dog cart and drove off into the tunnels.

After Vespers Simon Duval had returned to his quarters in the Cardinal’s palace and changed into his best finery for the banquet at the Louvre in the Abbot’s honour.

Catherine de Medici, the Queen Mother and the young King Charles IX were to preside and everyone of importance in France, both Catholic and Huguenot, would be in attendance, as well as the Ambassadors from England, Spain, Holland, Germany, Italy and the Holy See. Duval knew that with all the Court intrigues being played out and alliances being sought there would be no opportunity for him to speak to the Abbot. That must wait until the morning. This evening it would be enough for him to be presented and recognised.

Then as he reviewed his appearance in a mirror and drew on his gloves, he anticipated with relish the encounter he would manoeuvre at some point between himself and Lerans. He took a final glance at the mirror, slightly adjusted the tilt of his plumed hat, and left.

At least three hundred people were in the Receiving Room at the Louvre and with the silks, laces, cockades, wigs and pommades it was difficult to decide who were the more beautifully attired, the women or the men. The 22-year-old King sat enthroned on a dais to one side with his mother, Catherine, watching as one by one the dignitaries were announced and received by the Abbot of Amboise with a slight inclination of the head. To a few he gave a faint smile and to others a small gesture with his hand.

The presentations were made by order of rank with preference shown, naturally, to the Catholics. But the Huguenots were not ill-received and Admiral Gaspard de Coligny was accorded a warm smile by the Queen Mother after he had been presented.

Duval, for his part, overdid his bow with an extravagant sweep of his hat which caused the Abbot to smile thinly at him, a gesture Duval completely misinterpreted. Both Lerans and Muss bowed curtly and formally before being swallowed up by the crowd again.

‘I have the feeling I’ve seen him before,’ Muss remarked,

‘quite recently, too.’

‘When clerics sit on thrones, they all look alike to me,’

Lerans answered dismissively as Duval pushed his way through the crowd to his side.

‘Well, Viscount Lerans, what is your impression of our good Lord Abbot?’ His voice had an edge to it.

Lerans shrugged. ‘What would you expect it to be, Simon?’ he replied. ‘He looks much like any other of that ilk.’

‘You surprise me,’ Duval said, ‘But I’m sure that on better acquaintance you’ll think differently.’ He turned to Muss. ‘And your impression, Herr Muss?’

‘That I’d seen him before,’ Muss replied.

‘Mine as well,’ Duval smirked, ‘and, no doubt, all three of us will see

him again and again.'

A liveried lackey came to Lerans's side and spoke quietly to him. Lerans nodded and turned back to Muss and Duval.

'You must forgive me if I take leave of you, gentlemen,'

he said, smiling, 'but, apparently, some friends of mine –

they're apothecaries – need me.' He bowed to a shaken Duval and winked at Muss before making his way out of the room.

For a moment Duval stared into Muss's eyes which sparkled with amusement. 'Walk softly, Herr Muss,' he warned and moved away.

This was not the evening it should have been, Lerans reflected, as the Alsations raced unerringly through the dark underground ditches and catacombs until they ran into the well-lit cave and stopped. Lerans stepped out of the cart and grinned. 'You must forgive me, ladies and gentlemen, for my appearance but I was at the royal reception.'

'For this gentleman, sire?' Charles asked, pointing at the Doctor amid general laughter.

For a moment Lerans looked bemused and then turned at the Doctor. 'But we met, sir, did we not, this afternoon at the Roman Bridge Auberge which you quit to find an apothecary?'

'That is so, Viscount Lerans,' the Doctor replied as he stood up, indicating Preslin with his hand, 'and, as you see, I found the gentleman.'

Lerans's face became serious. 'Where's Steven Taylor, your companion?' he asked.

The Doctor raised his arms and said, 'I have no idea.'

Lerans turned to Charles. 'Put out the word to find him at once,' he ordered, 'and bring him to safety.' Charles saluted, jumped into the dog cart beside the driver and rode off. Lerans smiled at the Doctor. 'An efficient means of transportation, don't you think, there's far less traffic down here than on the streets.'

'Are there many of these tunnels?' the Doctor asked.

'Two hundred and eighty-seven kilometres of them, to be precise, spread out like a giant spider's web under the city.' Lerans clicked his

fingers. ‘You can cross Paris like that and they are exclusively ours.’

‘You mean they belong to the Huguenots?’ the Doctor asked.

‘They are of Roman origin, a system of pagan burial grounds which, naturally, are of no interest to good Catholic souls so, day and night, we use them.’

‘Fascinating,’ the Doctor observed as the apothecaries muttered among themselves. ‘Quite remarkable.’

‘But, my Lord, doesn’t he remind you of someone?’

David exploded impatiently.

‘Absolutely,’ Lerans grinned. ‘The man in whose honour I was supposed to have dined tonight. They could be identical twins.’ He glanced at Preslin. ‘Which reminds me, I’ve missed my supper. Do you think I could have something to eat?’ Turning back to the Doctor he invited him to share a jug of wine.

Then, over the table and between mouthfuls, Lerans, with enormous charm and wit, put to the Doctor the most preposterous proposition he had ever heard.

6

Beds for a Night

When Simon Duval returned to his quarters after the banquet he was gratified that he had been recognised by the Abbot but irritated that Lerans had not only failed to identify the cleric but had also been implicated in the escape of the apothecaries. With the Duke de Guise and the Marshall Tavannes, he had noted the amount of time Admiral de Coligny spent in the Queen Mother’s company and they had agreed it was a matter of utmost urgency to draw the Abbot’s attention to the Huguenots’ influence over Catherine and, as a result, over her son, the King.

As he lay on his back between silken sheets, his head cradled in his hands, Duval mused on the new broom of Catholicism which had swept into power through the absence in Rome of the Most Illustrious Cardinal Lorraine.

The Abbot of Amboise would not mince words nor shy away from deeds. Heresy in the form of the Germanic and English denial of the

Pope's absolute supremacy, his infallibility in matters of faith, would be ruthlessly put down. The Queen Mother, quickly shown the error of her tolerant ways, would dismiss in disgrace de Coligny and those who served him. She would disperse the student community studying the precepts of the heretics, Luther and Calvin, in a district of Paris she had allowed to be known as 'little Geneva' near the Sorbonne. But most important of all, the marriage of Henry of Navarre to the Princess Marguerite annulled by a decree from Rome and France would once again sleep the sleep of the Catholic just which Simon Duval now did with vengeance in his heart.

Steven's night began less comfortably. his bed was a sodden palliasse on the floor of a small, dank cell in the basement of the Cardinal's palace and as he lay shivering in the dark he thought that although the climatic conditions may have been ideal for laying down bottles of wine they did nothing to help the human spirit. He felt he was justifiably angry with the Doctor about the secrecy and deception of their presence in Paris and he was determined to have it out with him when they met up again. To make matters worse, every hour a guard passed by his cell with a torch to make sure he was still there, which made sleeping, already difficult enough, almost impossible.

However, at two o'clock in the morning his circumstances changed when a resentful, recently demoted guard shone the torch brightly in his face and recognised him.

'Ho, it's you,' he said aggressively. 'Remember me?'

'Unfortunately, yes,' Steven replied and turned his face to the wall.

'Monsieur Duval will learn of your presence here immediately.' The ex-Captain of the Guard kicked Steven in the small of the back before racing off to Duval's quarters.

' *What!* ' Duval roared on hearing the news. 'That man in a cell! Get him out of there at once.' He scrambled out of his bed and threw on a brocaded dressing-gown. 'Install him in one of the Most Illustrious Cardinal's guest rooms.

I shall he there to receive him,' he shouted as he waved the astonished guard from his room.

Steven recognised Duval but was taken aback by his effusive reception.

'My dear sir, that such an error could occur is incomprehensible,'

Duval protested, ‘and I trust that when you see My Lord the Abbot in the morning you will remind him that I reacted with alacrity to a regrettable situation.’

‘Of course, I shall,’ Steven replied, looking around the magnificent room which had been given to him. ‘Very first thing.’

Duval bowed and backed his way out, leaving Steven to strip off and crawl between the silken sheets. Just before he fell luxuriously asleep he chuckled and thought what a sly old fox the Doctor was.

It was not a sentiment the Doctor would have shared.

Lerans had manoeuvred him into a difficult, dangerous corner, and cunning would not be enough to extricate himself but somehow he had to.

He looked at the earnest faces of the men who surrounded him, among them Preslin, David and Lerans, then slowly shook his head.

‘What you ask of me, gentlemen, is impossible,’ he stated, ‘and your destinies lie in your own hands, not in those of a stranger, which I am. The history of France is not mine but yours to write. Besides, I am a fatalist and my ethic is that what must happen will happen, regardless of all that I may try to do.’ But inwardly the Doctor felt ashamed. These were courageous men who deserved better from him. He wanted to change his mind and say, ‘Yes, I’ll play along with you,’ but he couldn’t. It was out of the question.

There was an awkward silence which Lerans finally broke. ‘Steven should be here soon,’ he said, ‘and when it’s daylight you can continue your journey.’

Then the dog cart came dashing in from the tunnel and Charles jumped out.

‘The Catholics have got him,’ he cried and explained how Steven had been taken by a night patrol. Lerans rubbed his chin thoughtfully and then turned to the Doctor.

‘Remain here, Doctor,’ he said, ‘we’ll arrange his rescue.’

‘Where is Steven being held?’ the Doctor asked.

‘In a cell at the Cardinal’s palace,’ Charles replied.

David grunted. ‘That won’t make it any easier,’ he confided to no one in particular.

‘Unless, of course, I order his release,’ the Doctor announced, emphasising the first person singular. There was silence as all eyes turned towards him. ‘But that would be mean-spirited in the extreme, gentlemen, to play the role you propose only because it suits my purpose. So, confronted as I am with *force majeure* I shall play it for the common good. But let me remind you once again, Viscount Lerans, that I am a fatalist.’

‘My name is Gaston,’ Lerans replied and kissed the Doctor on both cheeks.

Disengaging himself as best he could the Doctor said that he would need to know everything about the Abbot, whom he saw, where he went, what appointments were arranged for him, and all of it to the last detail.

‘Our web of spies is like the tunnels, Doctor,’ Lerans said. ‘It reaches out everywhere.’

The Doctor cleared his throat. ‘And, of course, I’ll be driven around in that,’ he said, pointing to the dog cart.

Lerans nodded and smiled as he realised that the Doctor was about to enjoy himself thoroughly.

Steven woke up with hot sunlight cascading through the open casement windows. A servant was in the room who said that he had taken the liberty of having Steven’s unusual attire brushed, had drawn him a cooling bath and asked if he required some refreshment before his appointment with Simon Duval and the Abbot of Amboise.

Steven thanked him and suggested that a jug of milk with some biscuits would make a pleasant breakfast.

An hour later Duval knocked respectfully on the door and waited for Steven to invite him in.

‘I trust you slept well?’ Duval enquired.

Steven smiled. ‘The second part of the night was better than the first,’ he replied.

Duval looked uncomfortable and admitted that the incident was most

unfortunate, then suggested that they should visit the Abbot in his office immediately.

'With pleasure,' Steven said and tried to keep a serious expression on his face as they left the room. The Cardinal's palace was the epitome of luxury with high, vaulted corridors and priceless tapestries and paintings hanging on the walls. The floors were tiled in marble and along the centre was an exquisite red pile carpet. Here and there were satin-covered chairs and the white double doors which opened to the rooms beyond had superbly painted and delicately decorated panels. Steven thought that it was a far cry from the streets he and the Doctor had walked along the previous day. Then they came to a double door with two liveried halberdiers standing outside.

'My Lord Abbot,' Duval said to neither in particular and the doors were promptly opened. Duval waved Steven to lead the way in and the doors closed silently behind them. They stood in a small, carpeted reception room furnished with chairs, similar to the ones outside,and an ornate desk. The man seated behind it jumped to his feet as soon as he saw them. He had an harassed air to him but he was clearly relieved to see Duval.

'My Lord Abbot awaits, sir,' he said, scurrying over to a second double door to open one side of it. This time Duval went in first, the door closing discreetly behind them.

The Abbot of Amboise sat on a high-backed, gilt chair behind a huge, intricately carved, marble-topped desk. His cowl was thrown back off his head and his hands joined as if in prayer with the tips of his forefingers resting against his pursed lips. But the eyes above them were cold and hard. Steven decided that he had never seen the Doctor look so angry.

'Who is this fellow?' the Abbot asked in glacial tones as he swung his joined hands away from his lips to point them at Steven.

Both Steven and Duval were completely taken aback and, after a moment, a confused Duval looked from the Abbot to Steven and back to the Abbot again while Steven stood and stared.

'What would the wretch with me?' the Abbot demanded, while Duval stammered and stuttered. 'Speak up, for mercy's sake!'

'I th – thought you kn – knew him, my Lo – ord,' Duval finally managed to say.

‘I have never seen him before in my life,’ the Abbot snapped. ‘Put him back where he was found.’

‘Yes, my Lord, at once, my Lord,’ Duval replied and, grabbing Steven by the arm, ushered him out of the room.

Subtle old devil, Steven thought as he let Duval lead him away, realising that the Doctor had meant for him to be taken back to the auberge.

‘Clap this creature in the cells,’ Duval ordered the guards as soon as they reached the corridor.

‘That’s not what he meant,’ Steven protested as the halberdiers grabbed him by his arms. ‘He wanted me taken back to the auberge.’

For a fraction of a second Duval hesitated but then he remembered the Abbot had said that he had never seen Steven before. ‘The cells,’ Duval insisted and hurried back to the Abbot’s office where his second reception was even frostier than the first.

‘I ordered the arrest of some heretic apothecaries. Where are they?’ the Abbot demanded as the door closed behind Duval.

‘In hiding, my Lord,’ the luckless Duval replied. ‘They heard of the warrant.’

‘How?’

Duval shook his head. ‘I don’t know, my Lord, other than the fact that the Huguenot Viscount Lerans was involved.’

‘And who might he be?’

‘He was presented to you at the banquet last night.’

‘As were many others,’ the Abbot snapped. ‘Describe him.’

Duval looked around the room. They were alone, the Abbot and he, so he leant forward across the desk and lowered his voice. ‘The tall, blond-haired young man I challenged at the Roman Bridge Auberge,’ he murmured discreetly and then asked the Abbot if he remembered the incident.

The Abbot’s eyes became those of a cobra as he looked through hooded eyes at Duval. ‘Ah, that young man,’ he muttered and abruptly ended the interview by ordering Duval to bend every effort to find the

apothecaries.

Once outside and walking slowly along the corridor towards his own office Duval was curious about the Abbot's refusal to acknowledge Steven but was satisfied that he had done the right thing to throw him back in a cell.

It was not until later in the day he learned the Abbot had personally signed a document ordering Steven's immediate release.

7

Admiral de Coligny

As soon as he was released Steven made his way to the auberge to wait for the Doctor. The landlord, Antoine-Marc, although not pleased to see him, was curious to know how Steven had spent the night.

'Asleep,' was the only reply he received and Steven toyed with his goblet of red wine whilst watching the door.

But the first familiar face he saw was Nicholas Muss who came over and greeted him.

'No sign of your friend?' Muss asked and, while Antoine-Marc tried to eavesdrop, Steven told him everything that had happened since they last met.

'The so-called Abbot was the Doctor,' he concluded, 'or, if not, the spitting image of him and in that case why would I have been released?'

'Did you see him sign the document?' Muss asked.

'No, a guard came into the cell and told me I was free to go,' Steven replied.

'So you're waiting here for him,' Muss said, 'to have something similar happen again tonight if he doesn't show up?'

'I honestly don't know, I'm completely at a loss because I haven't the faintest idea of what's going on,' Steven admitted.

'Then come with me to Admiral de Coligny's house,'

Muss replied, 'at least, there you'll have a roof over your head.'

‘But the Doctor?’ Steven protested as Muss laid a hand on his shoulder.

‘In one guise or another, I’m sure he’ll turn up eventually,’ Muss remarked enigmatically and paid for Steven’s glass of wine as they left, leaving Antoine-Marc some more information for Simon Duval.

‘There were no difficulties,’ the Doctor told Lerans back in the cave, ‘as the Abbot walked out of one door, I walked in by another, put his seal on Steven’s release and gave it to a nervous, fat young man named Roger Colbert.’

Lerans laughed. ‘You’ve made a good start, Doctor.’

‘But where is Steven?’ the Doctor asked.

‘Safely tucked away at Admiral de Coligny’s house,’

Lerans replied, ‘and it’s better that he knows nothing of your activities.’

‘Why?’ The Doctor was indignant.

‘Because the fewer who know, the better.’

‘These people know.’ The Doctor gestured to the apothecaries and their families.

‘And they will remain here until you are gone.’

‘Then bring in Steven as well.’

‘No, Doctor, we can’t. Nicholas and I have discussed it.’

Lerans shrugged his regrets. ‘Steven thinks you are the Abbot, and Duval believes the Abbot has been playing you.’ He crossed his arms in front of him with his forefingers pointing in opposite directions, ‘and that’s a useful confusion to maintain.’

‘Why?’ the Doctor repeated irritably.

‘Duval will soon learn where Steven is and will have him watched,’ Lerans replied, ‘but if Steven were to disappear completely, Duval’s suspicions would be aroused.’

‘And how long must this charade continue?’ the Doctor snapped.

‘Until the Abbot and Duval are toppled from power,’

Leran’s tone was matter-of-fact.

‘And when will that be?’ the Doctor asked dryly.

‘It depends on you, Doctor,’ Lerans smiled, ‘so shall we say, a week at the outside?’

The Doctor remembered the date. It was 20 August and in less than four days a massacre would begin, one he knew he could not stop. He had extricated Steven from one prison only to have him put neatly into another, ensuring that he, the Doctor, would do as he was told. Wryly he conceded that Lerans and Muss were nobody’s fools.

At first Duval was mystified when Roger told him about Steven’s release. It seemed illogical that the Abbot would change his mind because he must have foreseen that the Huguenots would react as they had. And then he saw the master stroke. Both the wretched girl and the Abbot’s faithful agent were now in the same house, de Coligny’s. It was nothing short of genius. He would have liked to know how the Abbot had learned about the scullery maid but it didn’t matter. He was proud to be in the service of the most subtle and devious Catholic politician in France so he allowed himself the luxury of a few idle thoughts on the eventual fate of Gaston, Viscount de Lerans who he knew was no match for the Abbot of Amboise. His reverie was broken by the summons to the Abbot’s office.

‘We are to attend upon Her Majesty and the King,’ the Abbot announced after Duval had paid his respects. The Abbot insisted they took the Cardinal’s carriage to the Louvre.

Steven was fretting about the Doctor so he went to Lerans’

office in the Admiral’s house.

‘Nicholas informs me that you are comfortably installed,’ Lerans said, waving Steven towards a chair.

‘I’d rather stand,’ Steven replied and expressed his confusion and concern for the Doctor.

‘Stop worrying, Steven, I can assure you the Abbot is not your friend,’ Lerans replied.

‘Then where is the Doctor?’ Steven insisted.

‘With the apothecary he went to see,’ Lerans said.

‘For twenty-four hours,’ Steven replied in disbelief.

Lerans laughed. ‘I know apothecaries and once you get them together, there’s no stopping them,’ he said. ‘One of them raises a point and another one says we need Joseph’s opinion on that and off someone goes to find him. They can go on for days.’

Steven knew that the Doctor’s concept of time was different to anyone else’s but the fact that he hadn’t reappeared (or had he?) still troubled him.

‘And an apothecary’s wife is a special kind of lady,’

Lerans continued. ‘They understand these gatherings and know when to offer them some refreshment or even a bed, if need be.’

‘Hhmmm,’ Steven said half-dubiously. There was a tap on the door.

‘Come in,’ Lerans said and Anne came into the room with a tray, a jug of wine and a goblet. ‘We need another, Anne.’

She smiled at Steven, made a small curtsey, set the tray on the desk and left.

‘You still take what she said seriously?’ Steven asked.

‘They’ve even been here to ask us to let them take her back,’ Lerans replied. ‘That much fuss over a kitchen maid? Yes, we take her seriously.’

‘Then what do you suspect?’

‘An assassination attempt on the life of my master, King Henri of Navarre,’ Lerans replied, ‘engineered by the Abbot of Amboise.’

‘Oh,’ Steven said reflectively.

‘Now do you understand?’ Lerans asked as Anne came back into the room with the second goblet.

‘I think, perhaps, I’m beginning to,’ Steven replied as Lerans poured some wine.

The Abbot of Amboise and Simon Duval entered the vast Council Chamber of the Louvre with its friezes, paintings, tapestries and

brocaded curtains. At the far end of the room was a dais with two steps and covered by a superbly patterned carpet on which were two thrones and above them a silken canopy in scarlet and gold over. Her Majesty, Catherine, the Queen Mother, sat on one throne and His Majesty, King Charles IX, on the other. On the marble floor around the foot of the dais stood the Councillors and Duval's eyes quickly noted that both camps, Catholic and Huguenot were represented.

The Catholics were led by the King's younger brother, Duke Henri of Anjou, with Francois, Duke of Guise, the Duke of Nevers and Marshall Tavannes in attendance. For the Huguenots were King Henri of Navarre, the Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, Nicholas Muss and Viscount Gaston Lerans.

'My Lord Abbot.' Both the Queen Mother and the King murmured as he bowed over their outstretched hands.

'Your Majesties,' he replied and smiled thinly at both camps.

'Let us to business,' the King said and promptly had a fit of coughing which lasted for at least a minute, after which he wiped the flecks of blood from the corners of his mouth with a lace handkerchief. 'Wine, give us wine,' he croaked. A golden chalice was handed to him by a servant and he sipped from it. Then he leant back on his throne and closed his eyes.

'Rest, my son, rest,' the Queen Mother said and patted his hand. 'We shall deal with the affairs of state.' She paused and looked down at the faces around her. 'We shall hear first from our loyal Admiral of France.'

Gaspard de Coligny was a well-built man in his early fifties, a devoted servant of the crown and a fervent believer in a united France, regardless of religious inclinations. Although a Huguenot and lacking in a sense of humour, his genuine humility had kept him close to the royal family since. Charles became King at the age of ten and his influence over the Queen Mother was unequalled.

'Your Majesty, My Liege,' he began, glancing from Catherine to the open-mouthed young man who was still gasping for air. 'May I come back upon our allegiance to the Dutch, the Sea Beggars as they are called.'

'You always do, Admiral,' Marshall Tavannes interjected.

'Their war with the Spanish Low Countries is a just one and merits our

aid,' de Coligny continued, ignoring the remark.

'My dear Admiral, didn't our brother-in-law, King Henri of Navarre, who stands beside you, raise an English army to aid the Sea Beggars?' the Duke of Anjou asked sarcastically. 'And wasn't it thrashed by the Spanish last month at Mons?'

It was a mercenary force, sire, privately raised because of your reluctance to see justice done.' Navarre was unperturbed. 'Their hearts were not in the fight.'

'God's right and God's might will always be with the one truth faith,' the Abbot intervened.

'We talk of unjust territorial claims by the Spanish against the Dutch.' De Coligny shook his head sadly. 'All you can see is Protestant against Catholic, a continuing religious war.'

'I hate Spaniards as much as I love tennis,' the King spluttered from the throne.

'Then, my Liege, lend our force of arms to the Dutch, to the Sea Beggars,' de Coligny cried.

'Your Majesty, the Treasury could not support a French intervention,' Tavannes protested to the Queen Mother.

'I need some fresh air,' the King said.

'My Lords, your opinions will be taken carefully into consideration.' With that Catherine, the Queen Mother, ended the audience.

Henri, Duke of Anjou, speculated on how much longer his elder brother had to live and how best he could diminish the Huguenot influence over his mother. The Abbot of Amboise now knew the lie of the land and the three devoted secretaries, Duval, Lerans and Muss, had not missed a word.

Within an hour the dog cart with Lerans was racing through the tunnels towards the cave and an impatient, anxious Doctor.

8

The Escape

Despite Lerans's assurances, Steven was worried about the Doctor. If he were not pretending to be the Abbot, then where was he? He had

been gone for a day and although Steven thought that it was possible for the Doctor to be still with Preslin he didn't think it probable. He decided that there was only one solution – to go to Preslin's home and find out for himself. But when he tried to leave the Admiral's house he was politely restrained and told that he required the signed permission of either Lerans or Muss.

Angrily he demanded to see one or the other but was told that Muss was with the Admiral and could not be disturbed and Lerans had gone to the King of Navarre's residence.

As he stormed back to his room he met Anne in a corridor beside the pantry. He drew her to one side and discreetly asked if she knew a way out of the house without being observed.

'I haven't been here long enough to know anything like that, sir,' she replied.

'Isn't there some way through the kitchens?' Steven persisted.

Anne thought for a moment before replying. 'Not really, sir,' she said, 'unless you talk about putting out the rubbish.'

'How do you do that?' Steven asked.

'By the tunnel from the scullery. It leads to the other side of the wall but it's ever so scary,' she replied.

Steven smiled. 'Will you show it to me?' he asked.

Being mid-afternoon, the kitchens were deserted while everyone took a siesta so Steven and Anne reached the scullery without being seen. She pointed to a small door in the wall.

'That's it, through there,' she said.

'Thank you, Anne, and not a word to anyone.' Steven smiled and put his forefinger to his lips.

'Make sure you leave the outside door open because you can't get back if you don't,' Anne advised as she lit a taper and handed it to Steven.

'Bye bye,' he said and touched her cheek with his hand.

'Where are you going?' she asked suddenly.

‘Montparnasse, to find a friend,’ Steven replied.

Anne let out a little squeal. ‘Oh, my aunt and my brother live near there. Take me with you, sir.’

‘How can I, Anne, when you’re here for safekeeping?’

Steven asked.

Anne looked at Steven for a moment before replying.

‘I’ll tell them where you’ve gone,’ she said.

Steven was astounded. ‘There’s a name for people who do that, young lady.’

Anne smiled. ‘Yes, I know,’ she admitted.

‘It’ll be dangerous,’ Steven reminded her.

‘I’ll be safe with you,’ she replied beguilingly.

Steven sighed. ‘This is against my better judgement but come along if you must,’ he said and opened the door to the tunnel which was about thirty metres long.

‘They say there are lots of these but much bigger under Paris,’ Anne announced as they bent down to make their way along it. Halfway along a tunnel led off to the right.

‘Where does that one go?’ Steven asked as they passed it.

‘I don’t know and I don’t want to,’ Anne’s reply was a frightened whisper which made Steven chuckle. They came to the door at the far end which opened inwards. He extinguished the taper before peering outside. It was a small three-sided enclosure, like a stable with a wicker gate closing off the fourth side. He stepped out and Anne followed him, shutting the door behind them. Steven opened the wicker gate and looked up and down the street at the back of the house. There were no sentinels in sight and they hurried away in search of a carriage to take them to Montparnasse.

As the Doctor changed into his Abbot’s habit, Lerans explained the plan to him.

‘You’ll be taken to the entrance in Notre Dame,’ he began.

‘There’s one in the Cathedral?’ The Doctor was surprised.

‘We have ways in almost everywhere. The Catholics sealed them and then forgot about them. We remembered them and opened them. You entered the Cardinal’s palace through the scullery yesterday,’ Lerans reminded him.

‘True, but why am I not going back there?’ the Doctor asked as he finished dressing and Lerans produced a transcript of the royal audience which he gave to the Doctor to read.

‘That’s where we start undermining them,’ he said, tapping the document with his forefinger, ‘with Tavannes.

And you have two hours, Doctor, as the Abbot should he in his quarters resting and reading his Office.’

‘Should be, not will be,’ the Doctor remarked.

‘Almost certainly will be,’ Lerans replied with a smile.

A few minutes later the Doctor was on his helter-skelter ride through the dark tunnels until the driver drew in the reins and the dogs stopped.

‘Up the steps over there, sir,’ the driver said, handing him a lit taper. ‘There’s a judas-hole in the door and when you come back, I’ll be waiting here.’

The Doctor went up the steps to the door and blew out the taper which he laid down on the top step. He peered through the judas-hole and saw that he was looking into a small crypt.

No one was in sight so he cautiously opened the door, went into the crypt and closed it behind him. Light filtered in and he saw that on either side of the crypt was a stone tomb, with the effigy of a reclining knight in armour on one and a woman in a flowing robe on the other.

At the end of the crypt was a wooden door with an iron grill. The Doctor pushed down the latch and pulled the door open. In front of him was a short flight of steps leading up to one aisle of the Cathedral. The Doctor put his hands in prayer in front of his face to conceal it and went up the steps into the main body of the Cathedral. He made his way swiftly to the west entrance and drew the cowl over his head as he stepped out into the sun-shine.

With his head bowed he crossed the square and entered the Cardinal’s palace, threw the cowl back off his head and then, ignoring the salutes of the palace guards, made his way to Duval’s office on the second floor.

Duval was seated at his desk rereading reports of the vain attempts to find the Huguenot apothecaries when the Abbot’s presence was announced. He stood up quickly and respectfully as the Doctor swept into the room.

‘I wish a word with Marshall Tavannes,’ the Doctor announced, ‘so escort me to his residence.’

‘I’ll summon a carriage, my Lord,’ Duval replied.

‘No, we’ll walk, my son,’ the Doctor replied. ‘A prelate should be as one with his flock.’

‘Yes, my Lord,’ Duval agreed, although the last thing he wanted to do

was walk through the crowded streets on a sweltering afternoon. But the people stood aside to permit them free passage and the Doctor acknowledged their politeness with little gestures of one hand.

'Watchfulness is the mark of a good shepherd,' he observed as they made their way towards Tavannes's home, ''lest some predator fall upon his charges and devour them.'

'I agree, my Lord, we must always be on the alert for an enemy in our midst,' Duval replied with conviction.

'Quite so, quite so,' the Doctor murmured as they entered the Marshall's house. They were received in Tavannes's study.

'If unprepared for it, my Lord, I am honoured by your visit,' said Tavannes, a portly man with a flowing moustache who was in his mid-sixties.

'I do not procrastinate, Marshall.' The Doctor was curt.

'Catholic must not fight Catholic. So I agree with your hypothesis. France cannot afford a war with Spain.'

'That's the truth, my Lord, and the Queen Mother knows it.' Tavannes raised his arms in emphasis. 'Also she fears Spain's force of arms.'

'Yet both Catherine and her son favour de Coligny,' the Doctor reminded him.

Tavannes stroked his moustache and smiled. 'The King perhaps, but the Queen Mother has been wooed away.'

'That was not evident today, Marshall,' the Doctor snapped.

'It suits our purposes for the Admiral to believe he still has her high esteem,' Tavannes replied, 'hut let me assure you, my Lord, that the Court will soon be rid of the Huguenot's influence.'

The Doctor raised a protesting hand. 'I serve only the faith, Marshall, and I repeat, Catholic must not fight Catholic,' he said. 'The politics of France are no concern of mine.'

Looking at his face, Duval, who relished the thought of Lerans's and Muss's humiliation, was convinced that the Abbot could out-politic the Devil, if need be.

As they walked back towards the Cardinal's palace, the Doctor

announced his intention of going to the Cathedral to meditate and instructed Duval to return to his office.

‘I shall transcribe your conversation with Marshall Tavannes at once, my Lord,’ Duval said.

The Doctor looked suitably horrified, ‘No, no, my son’, he replied, ‘we spoke informally as man to man. What was said will remain a secret between the three of us.’

‘Of course, my Lord, you may rely on my discretion.’

Duval bowed his head in respect and left.

The Doctor entered the Cathedral and, as he walked along the aisle, was about to push the cowl off his head when he saw the Abbot of Amboise walking in the opposite direction along the nave.

Hastily, the Doctor dropped to his knees and bowed his head as if in prayer whilst thinking that with ‘should be’s’

and ‘will be’s’ the sooner he and Steven were quit of Paris the better.

9

A Change of Clothes

Steven and Anne found Preslin’s shop without much difficulty and walked along the narrow lane to the back as the Doctor had done on the previous day. Steven knocked several times at the door but there was no reply.

‘Three of them’s in there hiding somewhere,’ the rosy-checked, stout woman announced from the next door window. ‘Unless they crept out in the middle of the night.’

She added that not much missed her eyes, either on the street or behind it.

‘Hiding?’ Steven exclaimed.

‘The soldiers came by early yesterday evening, looking for them, I suppose, but they went away empty-handed,’

she replied.

‘Was one of the three men elderly, wearing a cloak and carrying a

silver-knobbed cane?' Steven asked.

'He was the one who came asking for Monsieur Preslin in the first place. But why don't you go in and look?' she suggested. 'It's never locked.'

Tentatively, Steven tried the door and it swung open.

'Thank you, madame,' he said and, taking Anne by the arm, went inside. They searched the house thoroughly but found nothing to give Steven a clue that the Doctor had been there.

'They must have made good their escape before the soldiers arrived,' Steven said as they stood in the bedroom which was a shambles with Preslin's clothes strewn everywhere.

'And the neighbour didn't see them leave, sir?' Anne sounded dubious. 'A busybody like her'

'Then can you explain it?' Steven replied irritably.

'No, sir, I can't,' Anne said.

'But I must find him', Steven was emphatic.

'Best not in those clothes, sir,' Anne suggested, 'they're a bit funny and you'd soon be recognised if anyone were to see you.'

Steven smiled wryly. 'I think you're right, Anne, but what else have I to wear?'

'His things, sir,' Anne pointed to Preslin's clothes.

'By the look of them, we're not the same build,' Steven replied.

'There's plenty of people in Paris who wear ill-fitting clothes, sir.' Anne scratched her head and smiled. 'So many you don't even notice them. I'll wait for you downstairs.'

Steven looked with dismay at the hose, the doublets, the buckled shoes and the plumed hats lying on the floor and the bed. He knew Anne was right but everything, apart from the hat, was too small. He sighed and changed, then he bound his clothes up in a bundle which he slung over his shoulder and went downstairs. As soon as Anne saw him, she had a fit of the giggles.

'Nobody would ever know it was you, sir,' she said, her shoulders

jiggling.

‘That’s a relief,’ Steven’s voice had an edge to it. ‘But stop calling me sir all the time. My name’s Steven.’

‘Yes sir – er – Steven, sir,’ Anne replied.

He smiled. ‘Where does your aunt live?’

‘In the *rue des Fossés Saint Jacques*. It’s not far from here,’

Anne said.

‘Saint James’s Ditches,’ Steven translated. ‘I’ll take you there.’

‘Very handsome you look, very handsome indeed, sir,’ the neighbour said as Steven and Anne left the house.

Steven gave her a sickly smile. It did occur to him to say that he would eventually return Preslin’s clothes but he decided against it.

As they made their way through the streets Steven discovered two things: the first was that Anne was right, no one paid any attention to him, and the second was that his borrowed shoes pinched. But the third discovery when they reached the aunt’s modest home was much more serious. A neighbour came in tears to say that Anne’s brother and her aunt had been abducted on the previous evening by Catholic soldiers.

At approximately the same time Roger Colbert presented himself at the Admiral’s house and asked to see Nicholas Muss. Nervously intertwining his plump fingers the young man explained that Duval would he willing to exchange the relatives for the wench.

‘Your master places considerable importance on retrieving this – er – wench, as you call her,’ Muss said calmly from behind his desk, ‘and for the life of me, I cannot think why.’

‘She has a contract of employment which she has broken’, Colbert replied, untwining his fingers to tap one set on the back of the other hand. ‘A situation, sir, which I am sure you would not tolerate in this household.’

‘Indeed not,’ Muss smiled, ‘it would mean instant dismissal.’

‘That is not our way,’ Colbert returned the smile, ‘After an appropriate reprimand the offender is given a second chance.’

‘In the true Christian spirit,’ Muss retaliated.

‘Perhaps the girl should be allowed to decide for herself?’ Colbert suggested.

‘Her return against her relatives’ release. That’s hardly the same spirit, is it?’ Muss shook his head and then pointed at Colbert. ‘Go back and tell Simon Duval to free her family and come here himself with a guarantee on his honour that they will not be abducted again.’ Muss leant forward, put his elbow on the desk and raised his forefinger towards the ceiling. ‘At that point, I will have Anne Chaplet summoned here’ – he reversed the direction of his finger – ‘to make her choice.’

Colbert inclined his head slightly and left the room.

After a few moments, Muss rang the small bell on his desk and asked his secretary to fetch Anne. When he learned she was missing he sent for Steven, only to be told that he, too, had disappeared. In exasperation he hit the desk with the his fist.

‘Find them, find them before the Catholics get wind of this!’ he ordered.

The Doctor had returned to the cave and, whilst he changed into his own clothes, Lerans listened to his account of the meeting with Tavannes.

‘So now Catherine’s with them and the Admiral’s on his way out,’ Lerans summarised when the Doctor had finished.

‘That’s how it appears,’ the Doctor confirmed.

‘The Queen Mother’s equivocation I can understand,’

Lerans replied. ‘She’s always tried to maintain a balance between Catholic and Huguenot. But getting rid of de Coligny is more difficult to understand because he’s the King’s man.’

‘You’re forgetting that Charles is tied to his mother’s apron strings,’ the Doctor pointed out.

‘Not since she forced him to marry Elizabeth of Austria,’ Lerans answered. ‘Since then he’s tried to be his own master.’

‘But he’s sick,’ the Doctor emphasised.

‘Yes, I know, and his little brother, the Duke of Anjou, the heir to the throne, is no friend of ours,’ Lerans added and then asked the question the Doctor dreaded: ‘But how do they intend to get rid of de Coligny?’

‘I don’t know,’ the Doctor lied and changed the subject.

‘Where’s Steven?’

‘Safe and sound at the Admiral’s house,’ Lerans replied confidently and returned to his own question. ‘Obviously, the Queen Mother must know. Anjou, Tavannes and Guise would not dare move without her consent.’ He paused and then smiled at the Doctor: ‘We’ll arrange an audience as soon as possible with her for you, my Lord Abbot, to find out.’

The Doctor looked at him with lugubrious eyes and sighed in resignation.

Duval was furious when Colbert told him about Muss’s reaction to the exchange.

‘No, I will not free them,’ he shouted and hammered on his desk. ‘Not until the girl is here. Go back and tell him that.’ There was a knock on the door. ‘What is it?’ he snapped as a sentry came into the office with a sealed note which he handed to Duval. Duval broke it open with a small knife and read the message. Then he roared with laughter and crumpled the parchment in his hand. ‘He’s got her out of there! He’s done it! Quickly, Roger, go and find them.’

‘Who sir?’ Colbert was completely confused.

‘The young man, the Abbot’s agent, and the wench,’

Duval replied excitedly. ‘Reach them before the Huguenots do.’ He took Colbert by the sleeve. ‘There’s a promotion in it if you succeed.’

Colbert scuttled from the room.

Steven stood on the street and tried to think. He was stuck with Anne as she had nowhere to go. But neither had he.

The auberge was out of the question as both sides would look for him there and he had no idea where the Doctor was.

Finally he realised that, without papers, there was only one safe refuge for him; the rubbish dump where the TARDIS stood, but he was

obliged to take Anne along.

Dressed as he was, a carriage was out of the question so they made their way back across the city as quickly as Steven's blistering feet would allow. On the way they saw patrols of Catholic soldiers and groups of men who looked suspiciously like Huguenots on a similar mission – to find them. Steven squeezed Anne's shoulder in appreciation as they walked unrecognised through the streets. He did not relish the idea of waiting for the Doctor among the putrescence, as the latter had described it, but he seemed to have no choice.

Some distance from the dump, Steven saw the crowd and, with a sinking heart and in spite of his feet, increased his pace towards it. He knew what had happened. Someone had opened the door to the rubbish dump and had seen the TARDIS.

Steven forced his way through to the front of the crowd.

The door had been knocked down as well as most of the front wall and the rubbish cleared away. The TARDIS was surrounded by halberdiers and over it were three stout tree trunks strapped together to form a triangular support for the pulleys and ropes which made up the primitive crane that was secured to the TARDIS and hoisting it, centimetre by centimetre, into the air so that the horse drawn cart waiting to one side could be backed in under it and take it away.

10

The Hotel Lutèce

Lerans was angry and perplexed when Muss told him that both Anne and Steven had disappeared. He wanted to know how and why.

'The how I can answer,' Muss replied. 'She must've shown him the rubbish tunnel which was unguarded.'

'So, he's gone looking for his friend, the Doctor, but why did he take the girl with him?' Lerans demanded.

'Surely, he knew the risks they'd be running'

'I'd've thought so,' Muss poured some water from a pitcher on his desk into a glass and sipped it. 'Both sides are out looking, let's hope we find them first. But what do we tell the Doctor?'

Lerans stood up and leant on the desk with his fists to face Muss.

‘Nothing. Not a word until the royal audience is over, until we know what’s proposed as de Coligny’s fate.’

‘When will Catherine receive *our* Abbot?’ Muss asked.

Lerans turned away from the desk and spread out his arms as he walked over to the window. ‘When I know *their* Abbot’s plans for tomorrow, then I’ll prepare ours. But count on it for tomorrow.’

Steven and Anne mingled with the crowd following the cart with the TARDIS loaded on it.

‘Is that something to do with you?’ Anne asked. ‘Is that why you took me there?’ Steven nodded. ‘But what is it?’

she continued.

‘A special type of carriage.’ He kept his voice down.

‘Where are the wheels?’ Anne’s curiosity was aroused.

‘As you can see. it doesn’t have any,’ he replied.

‘So it has to be pulled around like that,’ Anne said, sounding derisory. ‘Not very fast, more funny, I’d say...’

‘It’s... different,’ Steven conceded and wonder where the TARDIS was being taken to.

An hour later the motley procession entered a Iarge square with a forbidding fortress in the middle of it.

‘Where are we?’ Steven asked.

Anne looked at him in surprise. ‘You are a stranger to Paris,’ she exclaimed. ‘That’s the Bastille prison and very few who go in alive come out in the same condition, I can tell you.’

Steven stared in horror as the horse-drawn cart reached two huge wooden doors which opened to receive the TARDIS and then closed behind it as the crowd dispersed.

‘I’m hungry, Steven, aren’t you?’ Anne asked perkily.

‘Yes, yes, I suppose we should eat something,’ Steven mumbled, his mind elsewhere.

‘We’ve got to think about the curfew,’ Anne reminded him, bringing up yet another problem.

They found a small inn near the square and ordered wine, fruit juice, bread and cheese. Anne drank the juice and munched her food with pleasure whilst Steven barely touched his wine and nibbled distractedly at the wedge she had prepared for him. Finally, she reached out with a hand and touched his arm.

‘Don’t look so worried, Steven’, she said gently.

‘There are questions to he answered,’ he replied, ‘where my friend, the Doctor, is and, when I find him, how we’ll reach the carriage, but most immediately, where you and I can spend the night without being arrested.’

‘That’s no problem, at all,’ Anne replied. ‘There are some very good hotels in Paris.’

‘You need papers to stay in one,’ Steven protested,

‘believe me, I know.’

‘Not in these ones you don’t,’ Anne insisted. ‘Though sometimes, if you leave it too late, finding rooms can be difficult. So, eat up, we’ll have a good night’s sleep and see what we can do about the other answers tomorrow.’

Steven studied Anne’s face fist a few moments. Her fresh complexion was surrounded by a shoulder-length tangle of auburn curls, her nose *retroussé*, and under it a mouth which frequently twitched at the corners as though she were about to burst out laughing, or giggling, at any moment although her pale blue eyes were shrewd and knowing.

‘How old did you say you were?’ Steven asked.

‘I didn’t – but I’m fifteen,’ she replied.

‘That’s not too young to give good advice,’ Steven said and took a big bite of his bread and cheese.

Steven paid and as they left the inn he asked where was the nearest hotel they could stay at. Anne replied that there was one very close, only two streets away. As they walked towards it, the tocsin bell began to chime.

‘Only just in time,’ Steven remarked, expecting to find the hotel in front of them as they turned a corner. Instead he was confronted with an old, abandoned cemetery, overgrown with wild flowers and weeds amongst which a number of sepulchres sprouted. ‘Here?’ he asked with some surprise.

‘They say they’re very cool in the summer,’ Anne assured him. ‘Lots of students sleep in them and nobody minds.’ He laughed at her and put his arm around her shoulders.

‘Which would you rather, madame?’ he asked. ‘The southerly aspect, facing west, looking north or to the east?’

They found a tomb with a shelf on either side – and no bones. Crouching, Steven used a branch with some leaves on it to sweep off the dust whilst Anne collected some wild flowers ‘to decorate their apartment’, as she put it. Steven undid his bundle of clothes and made two pillows of them and placed one on each shelf. Anne had been right, it was pleasantly cool inside the tomb even though there was no door.

Later, as they lay on their shelves in the gathering dusk, Steven asked exactly where they were.

‘It’s called the Lutèce cemetery. Lutèce was the old Roman name for Paris,’ Anne murmured sleepily.

‘The Hotel Lutèce,’ Steven mused, ‘I shall recommend it to my friends.’ Chuckling, he fell asleep.

By morning, word of the TARDIS’s discovery had spread throughout Paris with, possibly, the only exception being the apothecaries and the Doctor in the cave. When the King heard of it, he called for a horse and rode with several courtiers, among them de Coligny and Tavannes, to the Bastille to examine it. From a discreet distance Steven and Anne watched them enter the fortress and saw the TARDIS on the ground in the centre of the courtyard before the doors were closed.

‘What do you make of it, de Coligny?’ the King asked as, from what was considered a safe distance, they circled the time-machine.

‘I have no idea, sire,’ the Admiral admitted.

‘An engine of war, perhaps, my Liege?’ Tavannes suggested.

‘But what manner?’ the young King asked. ‘An explosive device? It does not move unless it can fly like a bird.’ He flapped his arms whilst everyone laughed dutifully. ‘And why should it have been set down where it was?’

‘Perhaps, sire, the answers lie inside,’ de Coligny ventured.

‘We shall have it opened,’ the King replied and waved a royal hand at no one in particular. ‘Fetch a locksmith, the best there is to be found.’ He remounted his horse. ‘But none shall enter therein unless we are present.’ The doors opened and they rode back to the palace.

Lerans and Muss’s interest in the find was minimal.

Lerans had gone to the Cardinal’s palace to study the Abbot’s schedule for the day which was posted, as was the custom, on the main gates. Like the previous day, the only opportunity for the Abbot’s substitution appeared to be between three and five in the afternoon when he rested and read his Office but the problem was that Catherine retired to her rooms in the Queen’s Palace during the afternoon and could not be disturbed.

For Muss’s part, his disinterest was due to his concern for the Admiral’s position in the Court and he spent the morning trying to work out, without much success, which Catholic political manoeuvre would be most likely to bring about his master’s downfall.

On the other hand, the Abbot of Amboise was most interested in the bizarre machine but he was too preoccupied with the relative strengths of Catholics and Huguenots in other parts of France to go and look at it himself. So he sent Duval who found the locksmith hard at work trying to prise open the lock whilst being watched by the halberdiers on guard.

‘What progress do you make?’ Duval asked. The locksmith straightened up and scratched the back of his neck.

‘With all the betties that I’ve got, my lord,’ he said, jingling a ring with wires, hooks and odd-shaped needles hanging from it, ‘with all of them there’s not a lock in Paris, no, in all of France, that’ll keep me out.’ He pointed at the keyhole in the TARDIS door. ‘But this one’s made by the devil himself for it’s like none other I’ve ever seen.’

‘The black arts,’ Duval murmured as the locksmith inserted another needle into the keyhole and tried to manoeuvre it. Then he yelped and leapt back. ‘What is it, fellow?’

‘It set my arm on fire inside,’ the locksmith blurted.

‘Show me,’ Duval said and examined the man’s arm. ‘I see no sign of burning.’

‘Inside my arm, like a cramping of the muscles,’ the locksmith wailed and then pointed at the key stuck in the lock. ‘And how will I get that one out?’

‘Touch nothing,’ Duval ordered and turned to the halberdiers. ‘Take this hapless creature and incarcerate him alone for he is possessed by Satan, the Lord of Darkness.’

Bemoaning his miserable fate, the locksmith was taken away and thrown into one of the Bastille’s dungeons whilst Duval made his way back to the Cardinal’s palace as quickly as possible.

Lerans paced nerviously in front of the Doctor.

‘I can think of no better method than to have you wait in the crypt of Notre Dame until a favourable opportunity presents itself to escort you to the Queen Mother,’ he confessed as the Doctor watched him wearily.

‘And if one doesn’t, what then?’ The Doctor had acid in his voice.

‘One will, one *must*.’ Lerans was desperate. ‘But we must be ready to take advantage of it.’

The Doctor sighed. ‘The interview with Catherine and after that we shall leave you,’ he said. ‘How is Steven, by the way?’

‘Fine. Very well,’ Lerans replied almost too quickly.

‘Mystified by your continuing absence, of course, but in good spirits.’

‘Hmm... ‘ the Doctor said non-commitedly.

11

The Royal Audience

Steven weighed up the alternatives which seemed open to him and came to the conclusion that returning to the auberge was the logical thing to do. The Doctor had said they would meet there so that was where Steven would wait for him.

He would have preferred Anne to return to de Coligny's house but she argued that Duval's men were watching it and she would almost certainly be captured by them before being safely inside its walls. Reluctantly, Steven agreed with her and they set off towards the island and Notre Dame.

Once again the day was clear, fine and hot as the mid-morning crowds bustled about their business on the streets. Steven held Anne's hand as they jostled their way towards the bridge but were forced to one side by an approaching carriage.

Not until it was level with them did Steven realise that the man inside with Duval was the Doctor. Or was he? he wondered and then, taking the risk of drawing Duval's attention to them both, Steven shouted out the Doctor's name.

But the Abbot of Amboise ignored him.

'Where's he going? To the TARDIS?' Steven asked aloud.

'To where?' Anne was puzzled.

'The Bastille and the carriage,' he corrected himself.

'We'll go back and see,' she suggested.

Steven thought for a moment before replying. 'No, no, we won't. We'll go to the auberge as planned.'

But as they reached *le Grand Pont* to cross the river, Steven had an even greater surprise. A carriage came rattling over it and drove of towards the Queen Mother's palace with one passenger inside, the Abbot of Amboise.

Or was that one the Doctor? Steven broke into a run, dragging Anne along with him. 'Doctor!' he shouted several times but the street noises were too loud for the Doctor to hear and the carriage drew away.

'One of those two men is my friend, the Doctor,' Steven stopped and gasped in exasperation.

'But which one?' Anne asked.

He shook his head. 'If I knew that our troubles would be over – well, almost over,' he corrected himself thinking about the TARDIS locked

in the Bastille unless, of course, that Abbot was the Doctor, in which case he should have listened to Anne, but if it weren't the Doctor then – he gave up in confusion and took Anne to the auberge where they mingled with the crowd outside and waited to see what would happen next.

The two Abbots of Amboise arrived at their destinations almost simultaneously, the first at the Bastille and the second at the Queen Mother's palace where the Doctor was shown into an ante-chamber prior to being announced.

'My Sovereign Lady,' the Doctor murmured as he bowed over Catherine's hand.

'What would my Lord Abbot with us?' asked the dumpy, plain, middle-aged woman in widow's weeds who ruled all of France over her son's feeble protests.

'I am concerned, your Majesty, about Admiral de Coligny's proposed alliance with the Protestant Dutch against Catholic Spain in the Low Countries,' the Doctor said, 'and I repeat, Catholic must not fight Catholic.'

'Nor shall they, my Lord Abbot, there will be no alliance and no war,' Catherine replied. 'We shall never permit it and with good reason. Marshall Tavannes is right, France cannot afford a war and moreover, as Henri of Navarre learned to his cost, we are no match for the Spanish force of arms.'

'But the Admiral has the King's ear, your Majesty, and argues persuasively,' the Doctor continued.

'And I am the Queen Mother, Regent of France,' she answered.

'With due respect, your Majesty, you *were* the Regent of France. Since King Charles's marriage you no longer are,'

the Doctor riposted.

Catherine dismissed the remark with a wave of her hand. 'Our son does as he is told, my Lord Abbot.' Then she leant forward on her throne, and lowered her voice.

'And do not be concerned about the Admiral's influence over the King. It will be short-lived. Monsieur Bondot will see to that.'

The Doctor knew he must draw her out, to sat exactly what was to happen to de Coligny. ‘Bondot?’ he asked in all innocence.

‘Our life has been spent in an attempt to reconcile Catholic and Huguenot, to see them live together side by side, free to worship as they will,’ she explained. ‘You may insist the Huguenots are heretics, my Lord Abbot, but it is a word we have tried to avoid – until now when our beloved France is placed in peril by these reckless men.’

‘And what has Bondot to do with it?’ the Doctor persisted.

The Queen Mother smiled at him. ‘Ask that of my younger son, the Duke of Anjou, or Henri of Guise or the Marshall Tavannes but not of us, my Lord Abbot, not of us.’

As he clambered into his carriage to return to the Cathedral and the crypt, the Doctor was dismayed that he had failed to prise the word ‘assassinate’ from Catherine’s lips but he felt he had sufficient clues to put Lerans and Muss on the right track.

‘First, show me the wretch,’ the Abbot of Amboise demanded, averting his eyes from the TARDIS in the middle of the courtyard. He was taken to a dank, dark dungeon where the unfortunate locksmith was chained to one wall.

‘In the name of Our Lord, I command thee, malignant Prince of Darkness, to be gone,’ the Abbot intoned while the locksmith moaned.

The Abbot turned to Duval. ‘Lucifer entered this miserable soul through his arm,’ he said and Duval nodded, his hands joined in silent prayer. ‘The possession is deep-rooted and the exorcism will be difficult and not without anguish,’ the Abbot added with fervour as the locksmith moaned again. ‘But the devil’s house must be destroyed before we begin,’ he announced, ‘no place must be left within which evil may hide.

Then he returned to the courtyard and, holding firmly onto the cross that hung around his neck, circled the TARDIS, studying it warily.

‘From the inferno of Hell, this fiendish engine came,’ he cried out when he had finished examining it, ‘so shall it return!’ He ordered the halberdiers to fetch straw and enough wood to surround and cover the TARDIS

completely. ‘Let it be burned at the stake,’ he shouted in religious ecstasy.

The officer in charge of the halberdiers approached and saluted him.

'My Lord Abbot,' he spoke deferentially, 'his Majesty the King has expressed the desire to see what lies inside.'

'Eternal damnation is within,' the Abbot snapped back,

'so do as I say: prepare this monstrosity for the stake. I shall deal with the King and return to light the cleansing fire that will rid the true faith of this satanic abomination.'

On that note the Abbot re-entered his carried and was driven away with Duval towards the Louvre.

As they approached *le Grand Pont* the carriage stopped.

'What's amiss?' Duval called up to the driver.

'Another carriage which comes in the opposite direction, sire,' the driver answered.

The Abbot looked testily at Duval. 'I am about God's business, tell the other to yield the way.'

'Yes, my Lord,' Duval replied and descended from the carriage just as the driver called down that the other carriage had turned to cross over the river to Notre Dame and the way to the Louvre was now clear.

'Who was it?' the Abbot demanded as Duval clambered back into the carriage.

'A prelate, by his robes, my Lord,' Duval replied, 'but I didn't manage to see his face.'

Which was just as well, as the Doctor had recognised Duval getting out of the carriage and, watching surreptitiously, was relieved when the Abbot's carriage continued on its way. His carriage drove past the auberge where Steven sat with his back to the square facing Anne who saw the carriage on the far side of the square.

'Isn't that your friend?' she asked and pointed, 'the one on his own in the carriage over there.'

Steven spun around and jumped to his feet. 'Wait for me here,' he said. As quickly as he could he forced his way through the jostling crowd and broke into a run towards Notre Dame. The carriage stood at the foot of the steps and Steven caught a fleeting glimpse of the

Doctor entering the Cathedral. ‘Doctor!’ he yelled but it was too late. He took the steps two at a time and burst into the stillness of the nave. He looked about him, along the aisles, everywhere he could think of but there was no sign of him–the Doctor or the Abbot, whichever one he was.

Steven retraced his steps back to the auberge but Anne was no longer there. He asked a man who had been sitting next to them where she was.

‘She left just after you dashed off,’ the man replied.

‘Did she say where she was going or when she’d be back?’ Steven’s voice was urgent.

‘Not a word, just upped and went,’ the man said.

Steven looked desperately up and down the busy streets but he knew it was hopeless. Also he half-knew Anne believed he had found the Doctor and had gone back to the Cardinal’s palace to try and secure the release of her brother and her aunt.

‘A pretty little wench, she was,’ the man added with a sly wink and Steven turned away.

Both Lerans and Muss hung onto every word the Doctor recounted about his audience with the Queen Mother and when he had finished they looked at one another.

‘But who is Bondot and how will he bring about the Admiral’s downfall?’ Muss asked.

Lerans shrugged: ‘Nicholas, I have no idea. On neither side does such a name exist, at least not to my knowledge.’

‘Then do we assume that it’s a codename for someone highly-placed who could topple de Coligny?’ Muss replied.

‘Highly-placed? We know their proper names, so why the masquerade?’ Lerans put the fingertips of one hand to his forehead. ‘Unless Bondot is one of two people whose names could never be associated with the Admiral’s defeat.’

‘The King or the Queen Mother,’ Muss volunteered.

‘Precisely,’ Lerans turned to the Doctor. ‘We need to know.’

‘Gentlemen, I have run all the risks that I’m prepared to in this venture,’ the Doctor spoke sternly. ‘Twice now I have almost come face to face with the real Abbot of Amboise. The third time could be an actual confrontation.

No, I agreed to see the Queen Mother and then be on my way and I am holding you to those terms so, please, deliver Steven to me.’

There was a long pause during which Lerans and Muss exchanged an uncomfortable glance.

‘I’m afraid we can’t because we don’t know where he is,’

Lerans said finally.

‘He escaped from the Admiral’s house and took the serving girl with him,’ Muss added, ‘but they are being actively sought’ – he hesitated fractionally – ‘by Catholic and Huguenot alike.’

‘Try looking on a rubbish dump,’ the Doctor snapped back. Both Lerans and Muss’s eyes widened in astonishment.

‘Why there in particular?’ Muss asked.

‘Why not?’ the Doctor replied.

‘A mysterious object was discovered on one and it has been transported to the Bastille,’ Lerans explained.

‘And just before we came here, we heard that the Abbot of Amboise was on his way to see the King for it to be burnt at the stake,’ Lerans added.

‘What children you all are!’ the Doctor exclaimed and then exploded into uncontrollable laughter.

12

Burnt at the Stake

Intimidated by the Abbot’s fire and brimstone eloquence and, despite his curiosity about the ‘satanic abode’ (as the Abbot described it) which sat in the courtyard of the Bastille, the King gave his consent to burn it at the stake, although he insisted that he should be present when it was destroyed. The Abbot agreed but added that it could not be burnt immediately.

‘Why not?’ The King was peeved.

‘I must gird the armour of the Lord around His feeble vassal before I confront Lucifer and his demons in their infernal lair,’ the Abbot rhetorised.

‘Quite so, Lord Abbot,’ the King replied, unable to think of anything else.

‘I shall attend upon your Majesty one hour before the tocsin sounds,’ the Abbot proclaimed, then bowed and swept out of the room with Duval trotting at his heels.

Anne gave herself up to one of the sentries at the entrance to the Cardinal’s palace and was taken to Colbert who had her thrown into the cell with her brother and her aunt.

Then he hurried to Duval’s office to report that the wench was back. But to his surprise Duval showed little interest saying that for the time being she was unimportant as matters of far greater moment were afoot.

For his part Steven stood on the riverbank, throwing pebbles into the Seine whilst trying to resolve the dilemma of contacting the Doctor. It was obvious that he was masquerading as the Abbot of Amboise and the excuses put forward by Lerans and Muss to explain away his disappearance were patently lies. So Steven decided to go back to de Coligny’s house and have it out with them. But re-entering was almost as difficult as escaping had been.

He was refused admittance by the guards because he had no appointment, no written authorisation and his appearance wearing Preslin’s ill-fitting clothes was unprepossessing. But after a heated discussion which almost came to blows he persuaded one of them to fetch the officer in charge.

‘Take me at once to Viscount Lerans or Nicholas Muss,’

he demanded vociferously of the officer who looked him up and down with cold eyes.

‘State your business,’ the officer snapped.

‘That’s between myself and them,’ Steven retorted.

‘Then on your way with you, knave,’ the officer replied and turned to

leave.

‘All right, tell them Steven Taylor wants to discuss the other Abbot of Amboise.’

The officer looked back at him. ‘What do you mean by

"the other"?’

Steven prodded a forefinger towards the officer’s gilded doublet. ‘Just tell them what I’ve said.’ His voice was low and dangerous.

The officer hesitated for a moment then told him to wait and went leisurely into the building. His return a few minutes later was more hurried and his manner respectful.

‘Come with me, please,’ he requested, ‘and I’ll take you directly to them.’

Lerans was leaning against the wall beside the window overlooking the courtyard and Muss was seated at his desk as Steven was ushered into the office. Muss waved the officer away; he shut the door behind him. Steven looked from one to the other.

‘Well, where is he?’ he demanded. ‘And don’t bother to say with Preslin.’

‘But, Steven, I give you my word, he is,’ Lerans protested mildly.

‘Not when he’s pretending to be the Abbot!’ Steven threw back. There was an awkward pause during which Muss and Lerans exchanged a glance. ‘So where is he?’ he repeated.

‘Safely underground in Paris,’ Muss said.

‘Take me to him.’

‘No, not yet.’

‘Why not?’

‘There is a Catholic conspiracy against Admiral de Coligny but we don’t know what it is and your friend in his role as the Abbot is helping us to uncover it,’ Muss explained.

‘I don’t see that’s any reason to keep us apart,’ Steven replied.

‘Please, Steven, his job is almost done,’ Muss said, ‘let him finish it.’ Steven hesitated and Lerans stepped in.

‘Where’s the girl?’ he asked and Steven recounted his adventures with Anne and the conclusion he had drawn.

‘There’s only one person who’ll succeed in rescuing them and that’s the same one who got you out of there,’

Lerans said; ‘your friend, the Doctor, as the Abbot.’

There was a knock at the door. ‘Enter,’ Muss called out and an officer of the Court was announced.

‘His Majesty the King requires the presence within the hour of your masters and yourselves to accompany his Majesty to the Bastille to witness the destruction on the stake of a fiendish machine,’ he proclaimed. Both Muss and Lerans inclined their heads in acceptance and the officer withdrew.

But Steven was flabbergasted. ‘Destruction!’ he yelled,

‘but it belongs to the Doctor.’

‘We know, and we’ve told the Doctor it’s to be burnt at the stake,’ Lerans replied calmly; ‘but he, for some strange reason which he chose not to reveal, found it hysterically funny.’

‘I’m coming with you,’ Steven said.

‘Not in those clothes, my friend,’ Lerans chuckled.

‘They’re hardly fitting for the King’s presence. But we’ll deck you out as a courtier and no one will recognise you.’

In that they were wrong for, as the royal entourage stood in the Bastille courtyard awaiting the King’s arrival, Duval sidled over to him when Lerans and Moss were talking to Henri of Navarre and the Admiral.

‘Congratulations, the wench is under lock and key,’ he murmured with a faint wink, ‘and Maurevert’s here so it’s planned for tomorrow.’

‘Oh, yes,’ Steven muttered, understanding only that Anne was a prisoner again as Duval moved away and the heraldic trumpeters announced the arrival of the royal coach with the King and the Abbot at his side. The King beckoned de Coligny over to the open carriage.

‘We chose not to invite their royal Highnesses, our dear wife and our beloved mother, for fear they should be distressed,’ he snickered. ‘Wise of us, eh, Admiral?’

‘Most thoughtful of you, my Leige,’ de Coligny replied.

The King turned to the Abbot. ‘Proceed to God’s work, my Lord Abbot,’ he said and looked back at de Coligny.

‘Do sit beside us, Admiral.’ He patted the seat beside him as the Abbot descended from the carriage.

The Abbot’s habit was woven in gold and silver threads and the top of the wooden crook he held was studded with diamonds and other precious stones. Behind the carriage had been a procession of clerics and acolytes with thuribles of smoking incense. Now they came forward chanting and encircled the stake in the middle of which the TARDIS

was completely hidden by the wood and the bales of straw.

At the end of their chant, the Abbot began to intone in a high falsetto voice and circle the stake. He was followed by a cleric, whom Steven recognised as the rotund priest from the Cathedral, carrying an ampulla from which the Abbot sprinkled holy water onto the unlit fire.

When he had completed the round the Abbot raised his staff into the air and with his normal voice, cried out: ‘Let this cleansing fire consume your demonaical terrestial abode and force you, Lucifer, Prince of Darkness, to return to Hades to suffer the unending agonies of perdition.’ He lowered the staff, held out his other hand and commanded in ringing tones: ‘Bring forth the Flame of Righteousness and of the True Faith.’ An acolyte, holding a flaming torch, ran over and handed it to him.

‘Hie thee hence, Satan’, the Abbot screamed and threw the torch onto one of the bales of straw.

The King held a lace handkerchief to his nose and expressed the hope that the smoke would not start him coughing as he wanted to discuss the coming war against Spain with the Admiral, who beamed with pleasure. But the topic was barely broached when the intense heat of the bonfire drove everyone from the courtyard and the King, before returning to the Louvre, ordered the doors to be locked and desired everyone to accompany him to the Bastille at nine o’clock the

following morning to view the cinders.

Steven was quietly frantic as he rode back with Muss behind de Coligny to the Admiral's house.

'You said the Doctor laughed when you told him it was to be burned at the stake?' He kept his voice as controlled as he could.

'Yes, Steven, he thought it was the funniest joke he had ever heard and called us all children,' Muss replied, and then looked at Steven questioningly. 'But what is it?'

'The Doctor didn't tell you?' Steven queried.

Muss shook his head and said 'no'.

'He's the one to ask, not me,' Steven replied.

'But you do know?' Muss persisted.

'Some of the answers, yes,' Steven admitted. 'But not all of them, by any means.'

'Although he does,' Muss stated.

Stevens nodded. 'Every last one,' he said and they rode the rest of the way in silence.

The tocsin bell began to toll as they reached the Admiral's house and Steven found himself installed in a comfortable room and invited to dine with Muss. The food was exemplary and the wine vintage burgundy which made absurd the experiences of the two previous nights, jail-to-palace and tomb.

'They've got Anne, you know,' Steven said regretfully as he toyed with his glass.

'So you believe,' Muss replied.

'No, it's a fact,' Steven continued. 'Duval told me.'

'Duval?'

'At the Bastille this evening. I don't know who he thinks I am but he came over and congratulated me for getting her back,' Steven answered. 'And then he went on to say that Mauryvard or Merriverd was here and that it was on for tomorrow. I didn't understand a word.'

‘That name, Steven, that name, what was it?’ Muss’s voice was suddenly tense.

‘I’ve told you,’ Steven was taken aback. ‘Mauryviard, Merrivert, something like that, I was worrying about Anne and then the trumpets started blaring.’

‘Maurevert, Steven, was it Maurevert?’ Muss carefully pronounced each syllable.

Steven turned the name over in his head before replying. ‘Yes, Nicholas, that’s it – Maurevert.’

Muss pointed at Steven: ‘And Duval said it was on for tomorrow?’

‘Yes,’ Steven replied.

Muss’s fist crashed down on the table. ‘Dear God,’ he cried, ‘they mean to assassinate him.’

‘Who?’ a bewildered Steven asked.

‘The Admiral, Admiral de Coligny,’ Muss replied.

13

The Phoenix

Muss took Steven down to the cellars of the house and, lighting a burning brand, he led the way into the tunnels.

‘For us, there’s no such thing as the curfew,’ he told Steven as they hurried towards the home of King Henri of Navarre.

‘And the Doctor is in one of these,’ Steven said.

‘A cave in a tunnel, though not this one,’ Muss replied and explained about the network under Paris which the Huguenots used.

They entered the house through the cellars and were informed that Lcrans was dining with the newly-weds, Henri and Marguerite.

‘Pray, interrupt them,’ Muss said. ‘I must talk to Viscount Lerans immediately. It’s a matter of the utmost urgency.’ They were ushered into an ante-room where Lerans joined them moments later, still wiping his mouth with a napkin.

‘What’s amiss, Nicholas?’ he asked and Muss repeated all that Steven had told him.

Lerans looked at Steven. ‘You are absolutely certain that was the name – Maurevert?’

‘As certain as I can be,’ Steven replied. ‘I’ve already told Nicholas my mind was elsewhere.’ He looked from one to the other. ‘But who is this Maurevert?’ he asked.

‘He’s well-known as a professional assassin who’ll kill Catholic or Huguenot alike as long as he is paid handsomely,’ Lerans explained, ‘and the Queen Mother’s privy purse can well afford his fee.’

‘So now we know who Bondot is.’ Muss closed his eyes.

‘But when and where tomorrow? Someone must know.’

‘Not true, Nicholas,’ Lerans shook his head. ‘Bondot chooses his own time and place: that’s the way he works.’

‘But he’ll need to know tomorrow’s itinerary for the Admiral,’ Muss pointed out.

‘Have you told de Coligny about this yet?’ Lerans asked.

‘No, Gaston, I haven’t, it can wait until morning.’ Muss opened his eyes with a slow smile: ‘By which time I shall have prepared a second schedule for the Admiral’s day.’

‘We need a third, Nicholas,’ said Lerans. A glint came into his eyes as he turned to Steven. ‘Who does Duval think you are?’ he asked.

‘I have no idea,’ Steven confessed. ‘I’ve only met the man three, no, four times including this evening, but he’s convinced I am someone else.’

Lerans pulled the bell cord and waited in silence until a liveried servant entered the room. ‘Give my humble excuses to their Majesties, but I am unavoidably detained,’

he said and then added as an afterthought, ‘Fetch a pitcher of good burgundy and three goblets.’

The servant bowed and left the room as Lerans turned back to Steven: ‘Now sit down and tell us everything you remember about your encounters with Duval.’

The pitcher was empty by the time Steven finished and Lerans called for another, then topped up their glasses.

'Duval must be convinced you are a secret agent for the Abbot,' he stated and looked to Muss for confirmation.

'Don't you agree, Nicholas?'

'Yes, I do and I see what you're driving at,' Muss replied. 'The third itinerary, a totally false one, is given surreptiously by Steven to Duval for Marshall Tavannes at the aftermath of the stake tomorrow morning.'

'Precisely,' Lerans said, 'the first itinerary is posted publicly on the gates, the second is the one the Admiral will actually follow and the third is to fox Maurevert, alias Bondot.' He stood up and looked at Steven. 'If de Coligny dies tomorrow there will be civil war.' Then he chuckled grimly. 'Odd, isn't it, Nicholas, that we entrust the future of France to two strangers of whom we knew nothing forty-eight hours ago.'

'Of whom we still know very little,' Muss replied reflectively.

Steven drained his glass. 'I'll do as you ask but immediately afterwards I wish to be reunited with the Doctor.'

Muss and Lerans exchanged a glance. 'For averting a bloodbath that would be the least we could do,' Lerans said.

The morning of the 22 August, 1572 was like a pageant in Paris because word of the destruction of the 'satanic abode'

at the stake had spread quickly throughout the city. The sun shone down from a cloudless sky and the streets from the Louvre to the Bastille were lined with crowds as the procession of clerics and dignitaries, including Steven and Duval, Lerans and Moss, made its way towards the square to await the King's arrival with his Court at nine o'clock.

All around the Bastille was packed with the curious, but the area directly in front of the wooden doors and on either side was kept clear by halberdiers. The dignitaries dismounted and their horses were led away.

Steven gave Lerans and Muss a sideways glance and Lerans's nod was almost imperceptible. Then Steven moved towards Duval who was

talking to a secretary from the Duke of Anjou's retinue but when Steven caught Duval's eye the conversation ended and Duval came over cautiously to him. Steven offered to shake hands and the folded piece of parchment was neatly transferred from one palm to the other.

'Tavannes,' Steven murmured and turned away.

Cheering could be heard in the distance as the royal entourage approached the Bastille. Both Huguenots and Catholics were represented as Admiral de Coligny rode side by side with Marshall Tavannes and Henri of Navarre with the Duke of Anjou. Behind them came the royal carriage with the King and the Abbot of Amboise and it stopped about twenty metres in front of the doors.

'Your Majesty, the power of the Lord shall be revealed,'

the Abbot said fervently.

'All praise to God,' the King replied as the Abbot descended from the carriage. The Abbot wore the same habit as the previous evening but on his head he wore a mitre instead of a cowl and the staff he held in his left hand was made of silver and topped by a golden cruciform. With his right hand pressed firmly against the cross on his chest, he paced slowly towards the door between the two ranks of chanting clerics swinging their smoking thuribles of incense. When he reached the doors the Abbot struck them three times with the tip of his staff and commanded, in the name of the Lord, that they be opened. Two halberdiers and an officer who carried the keys approached, the doors were unlocked and swung back.

There was a gasp of astonishment and consternation from everyone present except the Abbot who recoiled in horror. The TARDIS, impeccably clean, even shiningly so, stood in the middle of a carpet of ashes at the centre of the courtyard.

Steven's secondary reaction after his immediate sense of relief that the TARDIS hadn't been destroyed was two-fold; the first was, knowing the Doctor, how could he have ever possibly imagined that it would burn? and the second was that obviously the Doctor had been on board and operated the EDF system. Suppressing a smile, Steven looked around half-expecting to see the Doctor with his arms folded laughing at everybody. But the only person who resembled the Doctor was the Abbot and he was apoplectic with rage and humiliation.

'Shut those accursed doors so that we look no more upon that diabolical abomination,' he screamed and retreated with a noticeable

absence of dignity to the royal carriage where the King asked him what he proposed to do next. ‘Your Majesty must call an immediate Council of War, a Catholic Council to which heretical Huguenots are excluded,’ the Abbot snapped.

‘If my Lord Abbot so wishes,’ the King replied, ‘but once matters of religion and this thing’ – he waved his hand towards the closed doors – ‘are settled we propose a general Council of War.’

‘Do you talk of Spain, sire?’ the Abbot asked with incredulity but the King merely smiled and ordered a return to the Louvre.

‘We struck a bargain,’ Steven reminded Muss as they rode back to de Coligny’s house, ‘and I’ve kept my side of it.’

‘We’ll honour ours as soon as the Admiral’s safely home,’ Muss replied and then looked at Steven intently before he asked, ‘What is that phoenix we have just seen?’

‘Something indestructible that has nothing to do with the Devil but belongs to the Doctor,’ Steven answered.

‘Who is a sorcerer,’ Muss said.

‘Steven smiled: ‘A magician rather, because of his intelligence.’

Muss was curious. ‘What is his learning and where did he study?’

‘I don’t know,’ Steven admitted, ‘we met on our travels.’

‘You’re a fortunate young man,’ Muss said, ‘such a companion is rare.’

‘Don’t I know it!’ Steven replied suppressing his laughter.

When they reached the house Muss extracted a promise from de Coligny not to leave it without him. Reluctantly, the Admiral agreed, saying that he didn’t know what the fuss was all about as no one was going to assassinate him: his relationship with the King was too close. But, nonetheless, de Coligny thanked him for his help and bade him farewell before Muss took Steven to the tunnels and a waiting dog cart.

‘This is blindfold astronaut training,’ Steven muttered to himself as they hurtled through the darkness towards the cave where the Doctor greeted him.

‘My dear boy, how nice to see you! Exhilarating means of

transportation that, isn't it? he enthused, pointing to the dog cart. 'Now, come and meet my friends.' Taking a speechless Steven by one elbow he led him over to the group of smiling apothecaries and their wives.

Steven was still recovering from the shock of the Doctor's casual manner towards him when Lerans came racing into the cave, jumped out of the dog cart and drew Muss to one side.

'There are problems, Nicholas,' he said. 'The King has called an extraordinary meeting of the Council.'

'Why?' Muss asked and Lerans glanced at Steven and the Doctor.

'The Abbot called for one,' Lerans explained. 'It's about their machine and Huguenots are excluded but there's to be a general meeting afterwards so now none of our itineraries apply.'

'It has created the same problem for Maurevert,' Muss observed. 'He won't know either where the Admiral will be from one minute to the next.'

'But he's so resourceful and he's operating on his own,'

Lerans replied.

'By your expressions, gentlemen, there would appear to be a certain difficulty – if not several – in which we are involved,' the Doctor remarked, coming over to them with Steven.

'Doctor, this is no longer your concern,' Lerans replied,

'both of you have honoured your agreements with us so you are free to leave and continue your journey when you will.'

'Hmm... ' the Doctor said after a brief reflection and turned to Steven. 'Are you ready to quit Paris, young man?'

he asked.

'No, Doctor, I'm not,' Steven replied.

'Oddly enough, neither am I,' the Doctor added, 'as there is still the last act of the Abbot of Amboise to play.'

Talk of War

The Abbot of Amboise's Catholic Council of War was well-attended but short-lived, The King, the Queen Mother, the Dukes of Anjou and Guise as well as Marshall Tavannes were there but, as the Queen Mother pointed out, the Abbot was supposed to be their spiritual adviser rather than the other way around

Even his harangue about the Huguenots practising the Black Arts produced no more than a comment from the King that perhaps a Huguenot cleric should be brought in to deal with the situation. That, the Abbot screamed, would be to yield all of France to heresy and Hell and, as the Most Illustrious Cardinal of Lorraine was absent, he, the Abbot of Amboise, was the only prison morally and spiritually equipped to solve the problem.

'You could try blowing it up, My Lord,' Marshall Tavannes suggested.

'Or drowning it in the Seine,' the King tittered.

'Your Majesty, this is not a matter for levity,' the Abbot said crossly.

'We quite agree, My Lord,' the King replied, 'and so we shall leave its resolution in your' – he hesitated for a second

– 'capable hands.' Then he turned to a courtier: 'Are our Huguenot advisers in attendance?'

'They are, your Majesty,' the courtier answered.

'Fetch them in and we shall apply our mind to other matters – but only briefly as we are in the mood to play tennis,' the King said.

Feeling openly humiliated, the Abbot stormed from the Council Chamber while Duval hastily passed on to a surprised Tavannes the parchment Steven had slipped him.

'From the Abbot's spy, Marshall,' he murmured confidentially before hurrying after the Abbot. Outside they ignored the Huguenots although Lerans inclined his head with a mocking smile to an unbending Duval.

Maurevert was average in height and build and as faceless as most of the thousands who thronged the Paris streets.

He was indifferently dressed in a plain blouse, hose with buckled

shoes and a floppy hat without a plume.

Only two features distinguished him: his eyes which were pale blue and alert, always darting from side to side, and the oblong box he carried under one arm. When he came to the house on the corner of a street with a commanding view of *le Grand Pont* and the Louvre he looked about him, took some passkeys from his pocket, unlocked the door and slipped inside.

'Ah, our loyal Admiral!' the King called out as de Coligny approached the two thrones. 'Give us your thoughts on how to dispose of that object sitting in the Bastille.'

'Why, my Liege, I'd make it a present for Spain,' he replied with a smile, 'delivered by our force of arms.'

The King shrieked with laughter but the Queen Mother and the other Catholics were not amused.

'Your proposed Spanish adventure is an obsession,'

Tavannes snapped.

'Not so, Marshall,' de Coligny retorted, 'it reflects my determination to give France a common cause and so prevent further civil strife.'

'The royal marriage has achieved that,' the Duke of Anjou said.

'If that were true then I should find myself doubly blest,' Henri of Navarre replied, 'but I fear it is not so.'

'Oh, what scares you, cousin?' Anjou retaliated.

'An incident blown up out of all proportion to put Paris in a tumult,' Navarre answered.

'But who would do such a thing?' the King enquired.

'They are called fanatics, sire,' de Coligny said.

Tavannes snorted with derision. 'Are you not one, Admiral, with your talk of war with Spain?'

'If you count my will to bring Frenchmen together, not torn asunder by religious polemics, as the act of a fanatic,'

de Coligny threw back, 'then, yes, I also am one of them.'

‘As we are too, good Admiral,’ the King echoed, jumping to his feet, ‘so let us prepare for war.’

The Queen Mother stood up and faced her son. ‘We cannot bear the expense of a war with Spain,’ she stated.

‘So you keep telling us, Mother – endlessly,’ he snarled and then began to cough and retch. The Queen Mother walked from the Council Chamber whilst the others waited in an embarrassed silence until the King recovered, wiping the flecks of blood from the corners of his mouth.

‘We adjourn this Council until three o’clock this afternoon,’ he gasped and, leaning on the arm of a courtier, left the Chamber as they all bowed respectfully.

Throughout the audience one Catholic had not said a word. He was Francois, Duke of Guise, and the brother of the Cardinal of Lorraine. Their father, also Francois of Guise, had instigated and led the massacre at Wassy ten years earlier, only to be assassinated himself a year later and there were still rumours that de Coligny was implicated in the murder.

For generations now the Guise family residence had stood on a street corner which dominated both *le Grand Pont* and the Louvre.

The Doctor and Steven’s final mission was to be a joint assault on the Cardinal’s palace so they made their plans together. The Doctor’s objective was the Abbot’s office and a piece of parchment bearing his seal; Steven’s was the cells and the rescue of Anne and her family.

‘There shouldn’t be any major problems,’ Steven said.

‘We need the Abbot out of the way but Duval, preferably, at his desk. So you, as the Abbot, order Duval to hand over Anne, her brother and her aunt into my custody as your secret agent and whilst we’re down in the cells – ’

‘I purloin the page of parchment and put his seal on it,’

the Doctor interposed. ‘The writing can be done later. No, dear boy, I foresee no difficulties at all.’

Steven leant forward confidentially across the table.

‘What about the assassination of Admiral de Coligny, Doctor?’

‘What about it?’ The Doctor’s voice had an edge.

‘Aren’t we going to do anything?’

‘I’m not in the habit of meddling with history,’ the Doctor replied frostily.

‘Oh,’ Steven sounded surprised. ‘But isn’t getting Anne out of prison meddling; isn’t the parchment meddling?’

‘Not at all. I, as myself, play no part in these deceits,’ the Doctor protested. ‘The person responsible is the Abbot of Amboise who, by chance, resembles me.’

‘That’s called begging the question, Doctor,’ Steven retaliated.

‘Absolutely not, not at all.’ The Doctor was most indignant.

‘Do you know where and when it will take place?’

Steven paced out his words.

‘Of course, I do,’ the Doctor snapped back. ‘I’ve read my history books!’

‘But you’ll do nothing to avert it.’

‘Not even lift my little finger,’ the Doctor replied, raising it. ‘Don’t you understand? I cannot, simply cannot.

Nor can you,’ he added adamantly.

Steven sighed. ‘Very well,’ he said, ‘have it your way.’

‘History’s way,’ the Doctor said and returned briskly to the business in hand. ‘We need to know, as soon as possible, when the Abbot will leave the palace, hopefully without Duval, and also where he goes.’ He called over David and asked him to obtain the information.

Maurevert climbed the stairs to the top floor of the house and entered the attic which ran the length of the building.

There were several skylights set in the roof but at the far end was a window which he opened.

He looked out at the streets below. No one coming from the Louvre and going to *le Grand Pont*, or vice versa, could avoid being in his

sight.

He smiled and opened the oblong box. It contained an arquebus, a handheld rifle of the latest design, which was supported in a crutch to make it steadier and more accurate when fired. He set the arquebus in it and trained the weapon on the street. It was perfect. He couldn't miss.

Then he took the gun from the crutch and began to prime it.

As soon as he reached the Cardinal's palace, the Abbot went directly to the reference library and, with Duval's help, began frantically searching through the tomes on Devilry for something that resembled the TARDIS but they found nothing.

'There is a material woven by men that cannot be burnt, my Lord,' Duval volunteered. 'The same must be true of a metal forged in Hell, like the hardened lava from a volcano.'

'A hellish alchemy,' the Abbot mused. 'That is a possibility, Duval. There must be something here on the subject.' He began looking along the bookshelves for an appropriate volume.

Duval felt pleased with himself and thought a further comment would not be out of order. 'It is a pity the day's itinerary for the Admiral had to be changed,' he ventured,

'particularly after all your man's pains to obtain the real one.'

'Hmm, yes,' the Abbot replied abstractedly as he reached for a book, 'it may be in this one.' He began to thumb through the pages.

'He passed it to me so neatly,' Duval continued, 'no one could have seen and it would have made Bondot's work much easier.'

The Abbot shut the book and was about to return it to the shelf but turned to Duval instead. 'What are you talking about?' he snapped, sounding like the Doctor.

'Your secret agent,' Duval replied.

' *My secret agent!* ' the Abbot exploded, sounding exactly like the Doctor. 'Explain yourself, man!'

Which Duval did, starting at the auberge when he first met them both and up to his last encounter with Steven outside the Bastille. During

this lengthy recital the Abbot continued his search for the book and did not interrupt, though when he was referred to he looked sharply at him.

'And I handed on the itinerary to Marshall Tavannes,'

Duval ended nervously.

The Abbot took down another book and silently looked through it before turning to Duval. 'I do not know whether you are a fool, a knave or delusional,' he finally announced;

'a fool unwittingly duped by the Huguenots, a knave in collusion with them, or delusional and imagining all.'

'I am none of these. On my sacred oath, I swear it, my Lord,' the unhappy Duval pleaded.

'Beware, my son, for your Immortal Soul,' the Abbot warned. 'For I have never set foot, disguised or otherwise, in the auberge you named. I have no secret agent in Paris, most certainly not the man you brought before me and whose release I am supposed to have ordered.'

Duval shook his head in total confusion.

'Return to the office and prepare a document of exorcism for the locksmith,' the Abbot ordered. 'When I return from the Bastille I shall sign and personally execute it.'

Word of the Abbot's departure for the Bastille soon reached the Doctor and Steven, both of whom were now dressed for their roles.

'Time for the last act, Doctor,' Steven said with a grin.

'After which, my boy, the Final Curtain,' the Doctor replied theatrically as they stepped into the dog cart and raced off along the tunnels.

15

Face to Face

The Alsatians were running at breakneck speed when the Doctor, to Steven's amazement, called a halt.

'Is something the matter?' Steven asked, holding up the flickering taper to peer at him.

‘Nothing of any importance, dear boy, just a penalty of old age,’ the Doctor replied. ‘I need a breath of fresh air.’

He asked the driver where the steps beside them led.

‘Up to a small courtyard that’s accessible to the street,’

the driver replied.

‘I’ll be back directly,’ the Doctor said and took the taper.

Steven offered to go with him. ‘There’s no need, my lad, I won’t be a moment,’ the Doctor reiterated and left them sitting in total darkness as he climbed the steps to the small door at the top.

He placed the lit taper in a special holder on the wall, unlocked the door and stepped out into the courtyard. He crossed it quickly to the street door which was barred from the inside. He took off the bar, opened the door a crack and put his eye to it. All was as he had anticipated.

It was almost three o’clock and Henri of Navarre with Admiral de Coligy, having lunched together, were making their way on foot towards the Louvre. Lerans and Muss followed them, scanning either side of the street anxiously.

At various intervals there were men and women leaning idly against the walls in the mid-afternoon heat or chatting to one another. They were Huguenot agents on the look-out for Maurevert who, from the attic window, saw the four men approaching. He rested the loaded arquebus on its crutch, cocked the firing mechanism and took careful aim as there would only be enough time for one shot. He bit his lower lip in concentration as his target came closer and closer to the accurate range of his gun.

The Admiral was only seconds away from certain death.

The Doctor had the selfsame thought as the party drew level with the door. It was now or never: the moment to commit the ultimate offence of a Time Lord – an intervention in history. He threw open the door and stepped onto the street.

‘Admiral!’ he called out at the same moment as Maurevert fired.

Surprised by the voice, de Coligny half-turned towards the Doctor and the charge from Maurevert’s guns struck his right shoulder instead of

entering his heart.

The Doctor dashed back into the courtyard slamming and barring the door behind him, then over to and through the small door to lock it, grab the taper, and descend the steps gracefully.

'I feel much better for that,' he announced as he clambered into the dog cart beside Steven. 'It did me a lot of good.' And they rode on.

There had been another witness to the attempt on de Coligny's life. Duval had watched it from the office window and had seen the Abbot, with his own eyes, step out onto the street.

Or had he? Was it all in his mind? Was he suffering from delusions, as the Abbot had suggested? He threw himself into a chair, put his head between his hands and groaned in anguish.

He was still sitting in the chair when the Doctor swept into the room, followed by Steven.

'Is it well done?' the Doctor demanded haughtily as Duval struggled to his feet, his mouth hanging open in astonishment.

'My Lord does not know?' Duval stammered as he stared at Steven.

'If I knew I would not have asked,' the Doctor retorted.

'It has failed, my Lord. I saw him helped away to his house by Henri of Navarre, Lerans and Muss,' Duval replied, his eyes still fixed on Steven.

'Why do you stare at him?' the Doctor's voice was suspicious. 'Do you not know him?' Steven winked at Duval.

'My Lord, why am I kept in this quandry?' Duval cried.

'One minute you acknowledge him and the next you don't.

You sign his release and then deny it. I am here to serve you and the Catholic cause. 'My Lord'– his voice was shrill

– 'but what would you have me believe?'

'In God's work, my son, there are secrets with which few are entrusted,' the Doctor intoned pompously as Steven suppressed a guffaw. 'Now, place the Huguenot family in the custody of my agent and see that his orders are obeyed without question.'

Duval led Steven down to the cellars and left him instructing Colbert to return Anne and her family home where they were to remain under guard until further notice. Duval returned to the Abbot's office where the Doctor had duly stolen the piece of parchment, stamped it and tucked it under his habit.

'My Lord Abbot, I told you that I witnessed the attempt on Admiral de Coligny's life,' Duval began nervously.

'Yes,' the Doctor agreed from behind the Abbot's desk.

'And earlier in the library you suggested that I might be suffering from delusions,' Duval continued.

The Doctor realised that the inconsistencies had seriously begun to show but all he said was 'hmm – hmm', anticipating the next remark.

'Yet I swear I saw someone who should never have been there,' Duval's voice quavered.

'Whom did you see?' the Doctor asked blandly.

'You, my Lord Abbot.'

The Doctor laughed. 'But Duval, I was at the Bastille where I met my agent.' The Doctor shook his head: 'No, my son, whomsoever you saw, it was not me.'

At that instant the door opened and the Abbot of Amboise – the real Abbot – came into the office. He stopped in his tracks, thunderstruck. Duval stared dumbfounded from one to the other. The Doctor was surprised but recovered quickly as he had always known he ran the risk of such an encounter. So he remained seated at the desk and pointed at the Abbot.

'Him, perhaps?' he asked. Duval drew his sword.

'Who is this imposter who usurps my office?' the Abbot shouted.

The Doctor stood up, his eyes glacial. 'I was about to ask the same question,' he said sharply. Duval swung the tip of his sword between them both.

'One of you lies,' he almost choked on the words.

'That is obvious,' the Doctor replied. 'but which of us is the liar? Am I? Or is he?'

‘ *I* am the Abbot of Amboise,’ the Abbot protested at the top of his voice.

‘So you say,’ the Doctor answered. ‘Perhaps others should decide.’

‘There is nothing to decide! *I* am the Abbot of Amboise!’ the Abbot screamed. ‘Kill him!’

The Doctor did not flinch as Duval turned his sword on him.

‘Kill him, I order you, kill him!’ the Abbot screamed again.

‘There speaks a man of God,’ the Doctor said calmly, ‘or is it the Devil himself?’ The doubt in Duval’s eyes turned suddenly to resolve and he spun around.

‘Begone Satan!’ It was a war cry as he ran the Abbot of Amboise through, killing him instantly.

The Doctor leant on the desk and reflected that if one of them had to die, he preferred fate this way; and, besides, fanatics of any kind were always very dangerous.

There was a knock on the door and Duval looked nervously at the Doctor.

‘What is it?’ the Doctor called out.

‘My Lord Abbot, you are summoned immediately to His Majesty, the King,’ a voice replied.

The Doctor was annoyed but it was not the moment to let Duval discover his blunder. ‘Call my carriage, we shall be there,’ he ordered and looked at Duval. ‘You’d better attend me, Duval, but no word of this, not yet. It has many ramifications.’

‘I understand, my Lord,’ Duval’s hands were shaking as he replaced his sword in its scabbard. The Doctor gave him a goblet of water.

‘Drink this,’ he said and Duval gulped it down before they left for the Louvre.

Steven had given his orders to Colbert, with a wink for Anne, and was watching the small detachment march away when he saw the Abbot’s carriage with Duval and the Doctor drive off towards the Louvre. He wondered which one it was as he walked back to the Abbot’s office where he found the body.

‘Doctor!’ he cried out, momentarily rooted to the spot in horror. Then, recovering slightly and hoping against hope that it was not the Doctor, he closed and locked the door, knelt down beside it and felt for a pulse. There was none.

He ripped open the habit and put his ear to its chest, straining to hear a heartbeat, however faint. Again, there was none.

He sat back on his heels and stared at the face in a desperate attempt to find a distinguishing mark, a scar, anything to reveal that the cadaver was not the Doctor. But the resemblance was uncanny. He searched the corpse thoroughly, seeking something that would enable him to identify it one way or the other, even if it were the TARDIS key to confirm his worst fear.

But there was nothing and staring at the mortal remains in front of him he began to realise the magnitude of his own dilemma. If this carcass, for that was what it was, was once the Doctor then where was the key? In the Doctor’s everyday clothes at the cave with Preslin and the apothecaries? He could only assume so, but even if he were to find it, had he the knowledge and the skill to operate the TARDIS alone? Or was he doomed to spend the rest of his days trapped in Paris during the second half of the sixteenth century? As he slowly stood up he knew that finally he must go back through the tunnels to the cave and wait in the desperate hope that the Doctor would come charging along in a dog cart.

The King had been playing tennis when he was informed of the attempt on de Coligny’s life and he immediately ordered the Council to be convened. ‘And that includes our mother,’ he added as he stomped off the lawn, waving his tennis racquet at the courtier.

At the assembly, the King listened attentively as Muss and Lerans recounted the events. The Queen Mother sat tight-lipped whilst the Dukes of Anjou and Guise, as well as Tavannes, seemed mildly bored with the proceedings.

‘What made our dear Admiral so fortuitously turn away as the shot was fired?’ the King asked when they were done.

Lerans and Muss glanced at one another and the Doctor before replying.

‘Some chance disturbance on the street, sire,’ Muss said.

‘Of what nature?’ the King enquired.

‘Someone shouted and, praise be to God, your Majesty, the Admiral turned to see who it was,’ Lerans replied.

‘And who was it?’ the King persisted.

‘A stranger, my Liege, wishing the Admiral long life,’

Henri of Navarre lied as Duval looked from one to the next knowing that all three were lying. Yet his Abbot stayed silent.

‘And, in your opinion, where was this shot fired from?’

The King leant forward on his throne and the Catholics ceased to be bored. But Lerans took the question in his stride.

‘From his attic, sire,’ he said nonchalantly, pointing at de Guise, ‘it was the only possible place.’

‘You’ll pay for that,’ de Guise drew his sword.

‘Where and when you will,’ Lerans threw back, sword in hand.

‘Put up your swords, gentlemen,’ the King commanded and both men bowed and sheathed them. ‘Has this would-be assassin been apprehended?’

‘No, Your Majesty,’ Muss answered, his eyes fixed on Tavannes. ‘In the confusion Maurevert, alias Bondot, fled.’

‘You know the assassin’s name?’ the King was amazed.

Then Lerans made a fatal mistake. ‘We know all about the conspiracy against the Admiral, sire,’ he said.

16

A Rescue

There was a stunned silence after Lerans’s laconic remark.

The Queen Mother glanced anxiously at Tavannes and the Duke of Anjou swallowed whilst de Guise stared with open hatred at Lerans. The Doctor stood quietly as Duval squirmed uncomfortably at his side.

‘We would hear of this conspiracy,’ the King said eventually.

‘No one conspired against the Admiral,’ your Majesty,’

Tavannes protested.

‘Then what did we witness, a hunting accident?’ Henri of Navarre did not spare his sarcasm.

‘A mad assassin’s bullet does not make a conspiracy,’ the Duke of Anjou retorted.

‘If that shot had been mortal, my Liege, as it was intended to be, all France would be embroiled in yet another religious war,’ Muss observed.

‘God be praised for well-wishers, eh, My Lord Abbot?’

the King said earnestly as Lerans looked at the Doctor and tried to discern which one he was. ‘And now pray give us your thoughts on this distressing affair.’

‘Your Majesty does me great honour to consider that my humble opinions are of merit in front of the Queen Mother and these noble lords,’ the Doctor replied inclining his head to the King. ‘I have already addressed this Council on the question of war with Spain and I said then that Catholic must not fight Catholic. Now, sire, permit me to develop that theme. Huguenot must not take up arms against another of his own faith, nor,’ the Doctor extended one arm in emphasis, pointed at the two groups of men who stood on either side of the thrones, and then spoke with firmness and authority, ‘nor Catholic against Huguenot nor Huguenot against Catholic.’

There were sharp intakes of breath from the Catholic camp and the horrendous truth of whom he had killed began to dawn on Duval. Both Muss and Lerans knew it was the Doctor who was speaking. ‘We are all God’s children, each and every one of us,’ the Doctor continued,

‘and it is not by acts of war nor bloody deeds that His Kingdom shall be attained, rather should we look to our own hearts and find therein those three blessed precepts of Love, Humility and Charity.’

No one moved in the ensuing silence until the Doctor bowed to the King. ‘With your Majesty’s permission, I shall retire to Notre Dame and pray for all our Immortal Souls.’

The King gestured to the Doctor with an open hand. ‘It behoves us all to dwell upon your words, Lord Abbot,’ he said, granting the Doctor’s request.

‘Stay here, Duval, and represent your Abbot,’ the Doctor said brusquely and left the Chamber.

As soon as he was outside the door, Tavannes asked the King to adjourn the Council.

‘Not yet, Marshall,’ the King replied. ‘We also have something to say concerning Catholic and Huguenot. You claim there was no conspiracy against our loyal de Coligny and, indeed, that may be true but, nonetheless, we have a special charge for you. As of this moment, we hold you responsible for the Admiral’s safety. Station your men around his house and, mark this well, Marshall, if anything further were to happen to him, you would pay dearly for it.’

Tavannes bowed as the King turned to de Guise.

‘As for you, de Guise, you also have a service to render your King,’ he said, ‘we declare our belief that the shot was fired from your residence, with or without your knowledge as may be, but we require you to bring to justice the would-be assassin, Maurevert. Do we make ourselves clear?’

‘Abundantly so, my Liege,’ de Guise replied acidly and bowed.

‘This Council is adjourned until – ’ The King hesitated:

‘No, not tomorrow, we shall play tennis all day, until the next day, the Feast of Saint Bartholomew.’

With the Queen Mother white with fury beside him the King left the Council Chamber.

Steven was still badly shocked when he reached the cave.

He had turned over the probabilities and the possibilities that the body he had left lying on the floor was the Doctor’s until rational thought was almost beyond him. He sat heavily at a table and put his head in his hands. Preslin came over to him.

‘Where’s the Doctor?’ he asked. ‘Is something wrong?’

Steven stared at him uncomprehendingly for several seconds, then a look of total astonishment came over his face as he jumped to his feet and hugged the bemused apothecary. ‘He’s alive!’ he shouted. ‘He’s got to be alive!

The body didn't have the parchment on it.'

'Steven, what on Earth are you talking about?' Preslin asked, disengaging himself.

Steven tried to explain but the words wouldn't come out of his mouth in the proper order. 'It doesn't matter!' He was close to tears of relief. 'It really doesn't matter!'

But it did a little later when the Doctor arrived in a dog cart. 'You wicked old man,' Steven cried reproachfully,

'letting me believe that the body might have been yours.'

'My dear boy, how you could have thought that for one moment is quite beyond me,' the Doctor replied in surprise. 'You know my knack'– he clicked his fingers –

'for dominating a given situation.' Then he took the parchment out of his habit, called for a quill pen and some ink and sat down to work.

Two other encounters were taking place about the same time and neither was as pleasant as the Doctor's reunion with Steven. The first was between King Charles and the Queen Mother in his chambers at the Louvre and any form of royal protocol was dismissed out-of-hand.

'I gave orders to be left alone, rnother,' he said angrily as she marched into his room.

'It's become your notion of late to give orders without consulting me,' she snapped back.

'I happen to be the King of France, madame, you'd do best to remember it,' he retorted.

Catherine snorted with derision. 'A pale shadow of a King you make,' she taunted. 'Your younger brother, Henri, would be ten times the King you are.'

'Guard your tongue, mother, or you'll end your days in a convent,' he threatened.

'Child,' she sneered, 'you haven't the courage.'

He reached for the bell rope. 'All I have to do is pull this.'

'Do so, I beseech you. Summon your guards, have me arrested. But

you will need a good reason for your Council and for the people of France who love me.'

'That I'll supply,' he answered categorically. 'The conspiracy by you, Tavannes, my brother and de Guise to assassinate Admiral de Coligny.'

'Don't forget the Abbot of Amboise,' she sneered, 'for all his pious words he had a hand in it as well.'

'I'll s – s – send you all to the block,' he stammered.

'For trying to rid France of a foe?' she mocked.

'The Admiral's my friend. You, madame, God help me, are the enemy.'

'Am I? I think not, my son. I care too much for my country to see it face ruin as de Coligny, every Huguenot would have it.' She paused for effect. 'You have a nest of vipers in your Court, Your Majesty.' She spat out the words. 'You even married your sister off to one, that Huguenot from Navarre, who'll usurp your throne as quick as look at you.'

The King tried to reply but suddenly his lungs were on fire and with the first rasping cough, blood welled up into his mouth. Any energy, any resistance he had, ebbed away as the Queen Mother drew his head to her bosom.

'There, little one, there,' she said and caressed his back.

The second meeting took place in the office of the late Abbot who still lay on the floor. Duval told his story of the the two Abbots to Tavannes, Anjou and de Guise all of whom listened attentively with an occasional glance at the body. When they had finished Tavannes slowly circled the corpse.

'How can you serve us in death,' he asked, staring down at it, 'better than you did alive?'

'We'll put about the story that the false Abbot's Huguenot secret agent entered the office and slew him', de Guise suggested.

'It's not enough,' Tavannes countered and pointed to the body. 'That must be used.'

'Throw it onto the streets, let the people see how treacherous these

Huguenots are,' the Duke of Anjou proposed.

Tavannes chuckled. 'We'll take the words from Navarre's own mouth and blow up an incident out of all proportion to put Paris in a tumult. Even all of France.' He looked at the other men in turn, finally settling his eyes on Duval. 'Personally, my friend, I think you killed the right man,' he said and pointed again at the cadaver. 'Let it be found in the morning, more cruelly assassinated by the Huguenots, in revenge for the attempt on de Coligny's life.'

They left the office, locking it behind them as Duval with renewed courage told them of Anne's release.

'Get them back,' Tavannes ordered.

'I shall attend to it personally, Marshall,' Duval replied.

Lerans entered the cave as the Doctor was signing the parchment with the Abbot's signature.

'You were magnificent, Doctor!' he exclaimed.

'They learned whom I am not,' the Doctor replied, 'and Duval must've shown them the body by now.'

'Whose body?' Lerans asked and the Doctor told him all that had happened.

'Tavannes is wily,' Lerans said, 'and he'll turn it to his advantage, if he can. He dare not touch the Admiral but he will try to find a way to attack us. Where are we most vulnerable?' he asked.

'Anne Chaplet and her family,' Steven replied and briefly told Lerans how he had rescued them.

'Then we've no time to waste,' Lerans said. 'Come on, Steven, and you as well, David.' The three of them leapt into two dog carts and raced away.

Duval beat them to the house but only just and from their cover behind a wall they could see him with Colbert and four halberdiers who surrounded Anne, her brother and her aunt.

'Six of them to three of us,' David growled. 'Two to one, they're good odds.'

'No, six to four,' Lerans observed, looking at Anne's fourteen-year-old

brother, Raoul. ‘He’s a likely-looking lad.’

‘What’s the plan?’ Steven asked.

‘Let Duval half-mount his horse and then we’ll take them out.’ Lerans replied as he drew his sword. David spat on his hands and rubbed them together before drawing his.

Steven unsheathed the rapier that hung at his side and hoped he hadn’t forgotten the fencing lessons he had taken at the Space Academy.

‘Now!’ Lerans roared and they rushed out into the open and towards Duval and his men who were taken completely by surprise.

Duval almost fell as he tried to free his foot from the stirrup and Colbert fumbled for the hilt of his sword three times before he succeeded in drawing it. Raoul wrested one of the pikes away from a halberdier and began swinging it like a battle-axe which sent the other scurrying to safety before trying to return to the attack.

‘That’s my hearty,’ David yelled as he grabbed a pike by the shaft, pushed it to one side and ran the halberdier through before turning to take on another. Lerans had gone straight for Duval and they faced one another for a moment before they began to fence. They cut, thrust and parried with great skill and fought with ferocity and verve.

Then one of Duval’s thrusts ripped through the sleeve of Lerans’s blouse and cut his arm.

‘First blood,’ Lerans observed, fighting tenaciously but his arm was bleeding badly and he knew he had to finish it swiftly or lose. Duval sensed the same thing and forced his attack with renewed vigour. Deliberately Lerans gave ground drawing Duval on and on whilst waiting for the mistake he was certain Duval would make: over-confidence.

Duval was fencing for the sword-arm and Lerans kept parrying it to one side until Duval’s body was almost unprotected and Lerans saw his chance. He flicked Duval’s blade aside again and, lightning-fast, threw his sword into his other hand and with two rapid advances thrust the injured arm forward until his sword was buried to the hilt in Duval’s chest.

Steven’s battle was less spectacular though he succeeded in holding Colbert at bay but the moment Colbert saw Duval fall to the ground

he threw down his sword and took to his heels with the one remaining pike-less halberdier following him as fast as possible while the tocsin began to chime.

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Good Company All

In the safety of the cave Lerans's arm was dressed and put in a sling while David recounted heroic deeds on everyone's part, not failing to mention young Raoul who beamed with pride. Then David pointed at Steven.

'But him, you'd've thought he was a wild Scot the way he was swinging his rapier like it was a claymore,' David shouted as everyone laughed. 'Poor fat little Colbert was scared out of his wits.'

Lerans went over to the Doctor. 'You'll be continuing your journey in the morning,' he said.

'Just before the curfew's lifted,' the Doctor replied, 'I have a few matters to settle first.'

'We shall never be able to express our gratitude,' Lerans added.

The Doctor looked at him ruefully. 'You have nothing to thank me for, young man.'

'You are too modest, sir,' Lerans smiled and then his expression became wistful. 'I know it's not yet done here.

Between Catholic and Huguenot, the suspicions, the mistrusts, the deceits are so deep rooted they will take years to eradicate. Far beyond my time, I fear.'

The Doctor said nothing. Then suddenly Lerans's face brightened and he spread out his unslung arm. 'Ladies and gentlemen,' he cried aloud, 'let us be merry tonight, with good wine and good vittles, for we are of good company all.'

At the Cardinal's palace, a quivering Colbert reported Duval's and the halberdiers' deaths to Tavannes.

'So much the better,' the Marshall replied, 'let their bodies lie dumb witnesses to other lies we'll tell.' Then he left for his meeting with the Queen Mother who received him in her apartments.

‘You have the King’s consent, Your Majesty?’ he asked immediately. She held out a piece of parchment which bore the King’s seal.

‘Having signed it with tearful blutterings, His Majesty announced that he would not quit his chambers until it was done,’ she said with a venomous smile. ‘The phrase His Majesty employed was quite poetic – let no soul rest alive to reproach us.’

‘Here is the list of those Huguenots who are to die,’

Tavannes held out a scroll which the Queen Mother threw aside.

‘ *No soul alive,* ’ she repeated. The Marshall looked at her with horror.

‘ *All*, Madame?’ he asked.

‘All,’ she replied.

‘And Navarre, your son-in-law... what of him?’

‘He will pay for his pretensions to the throne.’

‘Madame, Navarre must not die!’ Tavannes exclaimed.

‘Must not, Marshall?’ She was outraged.

‘Only pious tears will be shed for the massacre of a few thousand Huguenots,’ Tavannes argued, ‘but a King’s blood will bring about a Holy War, one we could not contain.’

‘We owe no Huguenot an act of mercy,’ the Queen Mother countered.

‘Mercy, Madame, never. But as a political act,’ Tavannes insisted, ‘sparing him is imperative!’

The Queen Mother thought for a time before shereplied.

‘Very well, Marshall, but he and our daughter must quit Paris,’ she stated, ‘and our son, Henri of Anjou, will escort them to safety. However, see that they are gone tomorrow for the gates of Paris will be closed before dawn on Saint Bartholomew’s Day. And then not even *we* could save him.

Tavannes glanced at the discarded scroll of names, bowed to the Queen Mother, and left, his duty to be done.

The Doctor awoke refreshed, stretched, splashed some water on his

face and looked around the cave. He thought one end of it looked like kennels as there were several dog carts standing in a line.

'It will soon be sunrise,' Lerans said with Steven at his side, 'and I know you want to be on your way.'

'Hmm, yes,' the Doctor replied, collecting his thoughts before he called Preslin over.

'This document,' he said as he picked up the parchment,

'is your *passepartout* out of France, signed and sealed by the Abbot himself. It'll see you and your friends safely to Germany.

'Thank you, Doctor.' Each one in turn gave him a Gallic hug before they rode off.

'What about Anne, Raoul and their aunt?' Steven asked discreetly.

The Doctor looked at him sharply. 'What about them?'

'Anne helped me, found me a room at the Hotel Lutèce, and Raoul fought with us against Duval. Can't you help them as well?' he pleaded.

'They mustn't return home,' Lerans added. 'It's too dangerous.'

'Couldn't they come with us?' Steven ventured.

'Out of the question', the Doctor exploded and then looked at them in resignation. 'Oh, very well,' he sighed and pointed to one of the two remaining dog carts.

'Take that to the eastern outskirts of Paris and then go as quickly as you can on foot to Picardy.'

'Picardy?' Raoul asked. 'Why Picardy?'

'Because I say so,' the Doctor replied firmly.

'Then Picardy it is,' Anne said. She kissed the Doctor and Steven on both cheeks, and clambered into the dog cart with Raoul and her aunt.

'But what will I do in Picardy?' the aunt wailed.

'Try growing roses, ma'am,' the Doctor snapped in exasperation and slapped one of the Alsatians on his rump, sending the dog cart

skittering off into the tunnels.

‘And now, young man, I think it’s time for us to go,’ the Doctor said as he slipped the Abbot’s habit over his own clothes.

‘But you don’t need those any more,’ Steven protested.

‘Officially, the Abbot of Amboise isn’t dead yet,’ the Doctor replied and took Lerans’s hand between his. ‘My best regards to Nicholas Muss.’

‘He’s with the Admiral,’ Lerans replied.

‘Where his duty lies,’ the Doctor said and smiled.

‘Please accept the word of a false Abbot when he says “God be with you”.’

Lerans nodded and everyone watched in silence as the Doctor and Steven rode off into the tunnel.

They entered the Bastille by a secret door as the bells of Notre Dame began to chime and the Doctor handed Steven the key to the TARDIS.

‘Open up the shop,’ he said, ‘I won’t be a moment.’ He went into the guardroom where the Officer of the Guard leapt to his feet.

‘What would My Lord Abbot at this hour?’ he exclaimed.

‘Take me to the possessed locksmith,’ the Doctor ordered and the Officer of the Guard led the way to the dungeon where the poor man still hung, chained to the wall. The Doctor went over to him, stretched out his arms and placed his hands on the locksmith’s shoulders.

‘Begone, foul demon,’ he intoned with severity and jiggled his arms up and down for good effect, then ordered the luckless man cut down, fed and released.

‘What about my betties?’ the locksmith quavered.

‘Make another set, ungrateful wretch,’ the Doctor said and left.

In the guardroom he announced that he was about to exorcise the TARDIS but that no one should look at it whilst he did so. Obediently the guards all turned their faces to the wall as the Doctor went out onto the courtyard and entered the TARDIS, locking the door behind him.

While the Doctor was taking off the habit Steven asked him what the Abbot's last role had been.

'On his desk at the Cardinal's palace, I saw an exorcism order for the hapless locksmith so I executed it,' the Doctor replied, rearranging his cravat.

'And why Picardy for Anne?'

The Doctor smiled. 'Because the Governor of Picardy was one of the few who refused to obey the King's edict.'

Steven thought about that reply before he put his next question. 'And Lerans?'

'What would you have expected of him,' the Doctor replied, 'other than to fight to the last?'

'Muss, as well, I suppose?'

'He was thrown lifeless out of the window together with de Coligny's body,' the Doctor stated the fact and then added two others. 'Ten thousand Huguenots died in Paris alone, and the Massacre spread to bring a total of some fifty thousand deaths throughout France. It was a senseless tragedy which will never be forgotten in that country's history.'

'One last question, Doctor. What was Preslin working on?' Steven scratched his head. 'You never did tell me.'

'Didn't I?' the Doctor raised his eyebrows. 'It was the theory of germinology, that diseases were caused by bacteria. So I sent him to Germany where a scientist was working on optics, inventing a microscope that would enable Preslin to see the microbes.'

Bemused, Steven shook his head slowly from side to side.

'And you claim you don't meddle!' he said, grinning.

'Don't be impertinent, Steven,' the Doctor replied with the trace of a smile and pressed the dematerialisation button.

Epilogue

He sat in the garden and waited for them to return as he knew they would.

‘Doctor,’ they intoned together.

He looked up and raised an index finger. ‘One voice will suffice.’

‘There are some questions which still remain unanswered,’ a single voice continued.

‘ *Sans doute,* ’ the Doctor replied, speaking French for the first time in centuries.

‘We shall deal with the apothecary Preslin first,’ a second voice announced. ‘You sent him and his colleagues to Germany.’

‘ *Pas moi,* gentlemen,’ the Doctor replied. ‘The Abbot’s seal took them there.’

‘Which *you* had purloined,’ a third voice accused.

‘You have proof of that, I trust?’ the Doctor retorted sharply. ‘Witnesses, for example?’

There was an awkward silence. ‘Let us consider the issue of the Chaplet girl and her relatives,’ a fourth voice said eventually.

‘I hardly knew her,’ the Doctor replied.

‘Yet you sent her and her family to Picardy,’ the first voice stated. ‘Why?’

‘It was too dangerous for them to return to their home,’

the Doctor explained.

‘Did they reach their destination?’ the second voice asked.

‘I haven’t the foggiest notion,’ the Doctor said.

‘Yet, in another time on the planet Earth you welcomed aboard the TARDIS a young woman of French origins named Dodo Chaplet... ’ The third voice was menacing.

‘Doesn’t that strike you as odd?’

‘No. Why should it?’ the Doctor half-chuckled. ‘Chaplet is to Dubois in France as Smith is to Jones in England. All good common family names. I see no necessary connection,’ he concluded, remembering that Dodo was the spitting image of Anne.

There was another pause before the fourth Time Lord spoke. ‘We have before us a contemporary woodcut by a witness to the assassination attempt on the life of the Admiral de Coligny,’ he said. ‘It clearly shows the presence of a cleric in an open doorway. Can you explain that?’

‘May I see it?’ The Doctor was fascinated and held out his hands into which the woodcut materialised. He studied it carefully and thought to himself that the artist who had made it had had a prodigious memory. Everything was exactly as it had happened. ‘I think, gentlemen, we must assume that the cleric is the Abbot of Amboise observing the failure of the Admiral’s murder.’

He held out the woodcut which disappeared from his hands. If only de Coligny had taken one half step further towards me, he thought wryly, Maurevert’s shot would have missed and I would be guilty as charged of changing history, for better or for worse.

There was a long silence and he knew they were gone.

He picked up Pepys’s diary beside him on the bench, opened it at random and tried to read. But his mind was elsewhere.

He was back in the tunnels reliving the exhilaration of those helter-skelter dashes through the darkness.

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